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• ARTHUR GRIFFITHS •



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A WAYWARD WOMAN

SECOND VOLUME

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A WAYWARD WOMAN

BY

ARTHUR GRIFFITHS

AUTHOR OF 'LOLA ETC

IN THREE VOLUMES

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A WAYWARD WOMAN.



CHAPTER I.

WINNIFRED FORSYTH was very much dissatisfied with herself after her rupture with Dominic Gwynne. She hardly liked to confess it, but this man really, of the many who had paid her court, was the only one who had touched her heart.

Now he was gone : dismissed for good and all by her caprice. Of course it was final. They were never likely to meet again : they led different lives, inhabited different worlds. Chance, then, would never bring them together, nor would he come often again of his own free will and accord. One other thought occurred to her : she might send for him. But at that her pride rose, and she declared it was

impossible. She, Winnifred Forsyth, make fresh advances to a man who had withdrawn voluntarily from the field ? Never.

Yet was she sorry ; she regretted deeply what had passed. Never before had she endured such pain, after any love passage, as that which followed the collapse of this. In spite of herself, she kept looking back, and longed with a strange eager longing no self-tutoring could altogether kill, longed to reestablish a good understanding and be once more friends with Dominic Gwynne.

This secret, however, was her own, and she kept it to herself. If she were deeply mortified at losing a future of solid happiness when just within her grasp, no one else should know what she felt. This, her fixed determination, she sought bravely to carry out, but the decision was easier to enunciate than maintain. The specific gravity of our secrets forbids often enough our sinking them outright ; they will continue to float upon the surface even although we load them with a dead weight of cold resolve.

Yet Winnifred hid her secret jealously and generally well. Now and again her step-mother went near surprising it and wondered what was on Winnifred's mind. She was well? Oh yes, perfectly well. Bored then? Very much bored, more than usual. Eager for another season perhaps; anxious to be once more in the thick of the fray? Not at all; in this Winnifred was most positive. On the contrary, she said that it was doubtful, when the season came, whether she would go out into society at all.

And this sober mood lasted all through the gloomy November weather; a time when daylight hours are short, when fog and murkiness prevail and the town is desperately dull. She continued very quiet and subdued, generally submissive too in her bearing and her talk, except when people trod upon her corns. Even when Christmas was passed she was still doing penance for her past sins, wearing sackcloth and ashes, telling herself she had played an unworthy part, resolved to flirt no more, but rather to eschew gaieties

and settle down a little prematurely into the humdrum old maid.

They were at breakfast one morning in Brook Street, the colonel poring over his 'Times,' Lady Clementina busy with her letters, when the latter said in a tone of surprise :

'FitzHugh is coming back—at once.'

'So soon ?' snorted Colonel Forsyth. His double glasses were so loosely fixed upon the bridge of his nose, and he snorted so much when he spoke, that at the first word they dropped with a click.

'So soon ? why ? no birds ? or has brigandage extended to the islands ? I thought it would.'

The colonel naturally took the gloomiest view of the situation. His brother-in-law could only be hurrying home under the pressure of some adverse chance. Had not Lady Clementina stated promptly the real reason of Lord FitzHugh's sudden return, a dozen other equally untoward explanations would have been suggested : as that the bailiff at Burcham had bolted, or that the yacht was

scuttled, or that yellow fever had attacked the whole ship's company.

'He has been recalled,' she said, 'for reasons of state.'

'They cannot dream of offering your brother a seat in the cabinet?'

'Why not, pray?'

'The ministry is pretty shaky already. FitzHugh would sink it if he joined.'

'Ferdinand, your remark is at best ill-natured. But FitzHugh's abilities and his value are highly appreciated by persons quite as capable of judging of them as you.'

'Pray get on. What's bringing him back?'

'This new town-hall at Smokingham is to be opened in state, and as he is lord-lieutenant, it is considered right that he should entertain the royalty who is to visit the country.'

'Ridiculous nonsense. I'm surprised a man at his time of life should be so vain. It will nearly ruin him, and, as you know, he is poor for his position. He does not do all he ought to do, as it is.'

‘ I cannot charge him with any illiberality, at any rate. He has been a good brother to me, and now he is showing a new anxiety to be kind and considerate to us.’

‘ In what way, may I ask ?’

‘ He is good enough to wish that we should all go to Burcham during the prince’s visit. Now, considering how many important points must govern the selection of guests, it is more than kind of him to think of us.’

‘ I don’t see it. There must be a lady in the house, and very naturally he asks his sister. But when does the *tamasha* take place ?’

‘ The last week in January.’

‘ Am I asked ?’ enquired Winnifred, speaking for the first time.

‘ Certainly.’

‘ Sorry I can’t go.’

‘ What do you mean by that ?’ said her father, speaking very sharply. ‘ Will you be good enough to explain why you come to such an unaccountable decision all in a moment ?’

‘ It will be most ungracious to FitzHugh,’

remarked Lady Clementina, in the long pause which followed, Winnifred being in no hurry to reply to her father's question.

'Lord FitzHugh is very good-natured. He knows me, and will accept my excuse.'

'You cannot have any reasonable excuse.'

'It will break in on my course at the Art school. I am working really hard at that and at other things. I can't spare the time.'

'I am exceedingly chagrined at your attitude, Winnifred.' Colonel Forsyth did not speak much, but when he did he liked pompous expressions, and now he would have gladly given vent to his rhetoric but that he never felt secure with Winnifred. She held her own with her father as she did with most people, a little because she was one of the few who had found him out.

With the crowd Colonel Forsyth passed as a very wise man, a character he gained from an admirable faculty for holding his tongue. His calm depreciatory smile, unaccompanied by a word of dissent or approval,

was like cold water on a discussion. When they saw it, talkers who were a little out of their depth floundered back immediately to shore; not that they need have feared his criticisms, but they were misled by the sagacity of his sphinx-like face.

‘I think country-house life detestable,’ Winnifred went on. ‘It would be ever so much worse on an occasion like this.’

‘You change your mind very rapidly, Winnifred, and without apparent reason,’ observed Lady Clementina. ‘I have heard you say that you preferred a country house to London—a thousand times over.’

‘May I not change my opinions? I claim to, as I do my dress. Life is monotonous enough. It is a distinct relief not to think exactly the same all the year round.’

‘Don’t complain, then, if you are charged with inconsistency.’

‘I don’t care if I’m charged with highway robbery.’

‘Whom does FitzHugh mean to ask?’ Colonel Forsyth said.

‘There will be the royal party.’

‘You will have to be making manners all the time, which I hate!’ cried Winnifred.

‘The prince is very unobtrusive, so young and always so pleasant. Then Major Burton is so judicious and sensible.’

‘He’s the oddest little fish I have seen. Looks like a child a few yards off, and when you get near he’s like a wrinkled old man,’ Winnifred went on. ‘I have no desire to make his acquaintance; a mere courtier and hanger-on.’

‘Well, well; and whom else?’

‘The Duchess of Hammersmith and the two Ladies Goldhawk.’

‘Charming young things of five-and-forty.’

‘And the duke?’

‘I suppose so. He’s not mentioned.’

‘Never is; when the duchess is within miles.’

‘And a great magnate from the town—a Mr. Crammersh, asked out of compliment, a man of colossal fortune.’

‘And not a single *h.*’

‘A man of culture, I am told ; a munificent patron of the fine arts, and he owns already a magnificent collection worth fabulous sums.’

‘All of which he will bring to the hammer, like ripe wine, when he thinks he can turn his money.’

‘And Lord Yellowborough.’

‘Indeed !’ said Colonel Forsyth in a marked way.

‘Yes ; she died you know last autumn, somewhere abroad, and he’s——’

‘Don’t mind me,’ put in Winnifred.

There had been a very unpleasant scandal a year or two back, when Lord Yellowborough, almost at his *début* in London life, had gone off with a woman old enough to be his mother. She had a husband, too, and sons grown up, but had first petted, then fascinated young Yellowborough, who was nothing loath to *afficher* himself and be led astray.

‘What do you know about it ?’ Lady Clementina said very abruptly.

‘I know that Lord Yellowborough hasn’t much character.’

‘Then you ought not to know,’ her father interposed, quite angrily. ‘And you could not get to know if you were properly looked after.’

This was a slap at Lady Clementina ; and she was preparing to defend herself by admitting that Winnifred insisted upon going her own way, always, when Winnifred took up the cudgels for herself.

‘If you had your way, father, we should be immured within four walls, we nineteenth century girls, I suppose?’

‘I have no great opinion of you, I admit.’

‘The girls are much obliged to you.’

‘The century would not have much to be proud of, if its reputation rested upon the girls.’

‘In what are we to blame, pray?’

Colonel Forsyth shook his head with a solemnity that meant volumes, but with constitutional caution he declined to be drawn into any open admissions.

‘Dr. and Mrs. Burmester, if they are back in time,’ went on Lady Clementina as gravely as an usher at Court.

‘Delightful people,’ the colonel said approvingly.

‘So their tradesmen say.’

‘It is most surprising, as I have said already, most surprising, how you pick up things, Winnifred.’ And her father again looked reproachfully at Lady Clementina.

‘I know a great deal more than you think,’ cried Winnifred, giving her father a meaning look—‘How about those Honduras bonds?’

Her father quailed as he might under the cross-examination of a keen lawyer who assumes to know even more than there is on his brief.

‘A very pleasant party,’ he said humbly.

‘I shall be charmed to go.’

‘I wish you joy of it.’

‘You surely will not persist in refusing, Winnifred?’

‘Think what you miss.’

‘I should miss more if I went. And I

am missing more by staying to talk to you now.'

This was all the answer she gave, and then she got up to leave the room.

'You are going?'

'Yes.'

'Where?' From Colonel Forsyth.

'To the Art school I suppose?' Lady Clementina said, being anxious to show some acquaintance with her stepdaughter's movements.

'You may suppose what you like,' and Winnifred, laughing, left the room.

Colonel Forsyth spoke directly her back was turned, severely.

'You seem to have no control over her, Clementina.'

'I have not, I admit. She is too much for me. No one could keep her really within bounds.'

'Except one person—her husband.'

'That is probably why she won't take one. She knows she would have to give in to him.'

dreadful disappointment to me, as great or greater than if she remained single. But she is so untrustworthy, so injudicious. I almost despair.'

'Just now she seems to have no particular admirer, so far as I know.'

Mr. Gwynne's episode had quite escaped Lady Clementina's unobservant eyes.

'That's why I wish so strongly she should be of the party at Burcham. Two at least of the men there will be very desirable acquaintances. I mean to imply nothing. God forbid I should throw my daughter at anybody's head, but I cannot be blind to the fact that Yellowborough——'

'Remember what is said of him.'

'Merely youthful indiscretion, wild oats. He is a marquis, his own father. Yellowborough House is one of the finest in London, and his Smokeshire property must be fifty thousand acres if it's a rood.'

'The other man would be more likely to suit Winnifred. Having art tastes, he could gratify hers. You know that now she is

devoted only to art. She has talked, indeed, of taking to it seriously as a profession.'

'Absurd and preposterous nonsense! as if I could allow that. And what sort of livelihood could she earn at it? She might as well turn needlewoman.'

'But there are lady artists now-a-days, plenty of them.'

'Lady Fiddlesticks! No real lady would take to it.'

W 'I beg your pardon; there is——'

'I presume it is you, then, who has put this absurd notion into her head? You pretend to be able to draw and paint, don't you? Is it your preaching that has driven her mad about art?'

'Certainly not. I have no very high opinion of her powers, and she is far too conceited to care for any criticism or encouragement of mine.'

'It is only a fad; it won't last. She is always taking up one wild scheme or another. Some day she will want to be a nun or a hospital nurse.'

Fad or no fad, Winnifred had thrown herself with surprising energy into the study and practice of art. She had parted with Dominic Gwynne, but his advice and teaching remained with her. His words were still ringing in her ears : ‘ You might do so well if you chose.’ Why should she not choose ? She would work—it was his oft-repeated maxim—work, and work hard, and in doing so find an inexpressible relief from the insipid frivolities with which all her days had hitherto been filled.

Winnifred was not slow or half-hearted in the execution of her resolves. This new and eager desire to study art had taken tangible shape soon after their return to London ; within a week she had enrolled herself at Swanwick’s well-known school of art, and entered upon her labours with all the vigour of which she was capable. Several forces impelled her. First was the laudable ambition to improve, and to make the most of such natural gifts as she possessed. Next came the decided affection for her work, which grew

steadily as she plodded on and prospered. Last of all was a subtle undercurrent, not less constraining, and this—although she would not have confessed it even to herself—was that whilst at her easel she seemed drawn into close communion with the old happy days under the Italian sky ; at each stage as she pressed onward she was reminded of Dominic Gwynne.

Had he but been able to guess the exact state of her mind towards him ! But even now he was leaning, weak man, to the new views of her character which old Greatorex had revealed to him.

Winnifred's devotion to the Art school quite outlasted any previous impulses in duration of time, which was a matter of supreme astonishment to her maid. Mrs. Eggleton, good soul, was by this time fairly accustomed to the freaks and fancies of her young mistress. How much these cost the poor woman I have in some measure indicated in the affair of the canoe : but this was by no means the first or only madcap adventure of its

class. Winnifred was of an enquiring disposition, restless and fond of change. She loved the London streets, their movement and bustle; still more the strange stirring incidents which now and again made them as eventful as any transpontine drama.

She was fond of trying new methods of locomotion. For one whole month she and Eggleton explored the underground railways; mastering all the details of a labyrinth to which experience is the only clue, enjoying her maid's perplexity at such *contretemps* as finding themselves at Dalston when they wished to be at Earl's Court; or at Willesden Junction when the point was Bishop's Road. At another time all her energies were concentrated on omnibuses, and she travelled from one end of London to the other regardless of stout women with squalling babies or odorous parcels, of pickpockets, of rudely staring clerks, of impertinent proselytising old men who thrust upon her remorselessly sheaves of sensational tracts. With Eggleton she saw the sights: the picture-galleries, the penny steam-

boats, and, above all, the shops. There was an indescribable charm in this independent manner of going to and fro; and for it she scouted with supreme scorn the pleasure of being boxed up in the brougham for hours with Lady Clementina and the chance, sooner or later, of a royal 'row.'

Trained thus and prepared for any vagaries, Mrs. Eggleton had less excuse for surprise at Winnifred's ardent adoption of art; yet this unremitting attendance at Swanwick's was more than she could understand. Certainly the lady's maid had no strongly developed arttastes, having had no revelation but through the street pavements or the illustrated literature of the servants' hall. But tastes were tastes; and if Miss Winnifred liked to muddle away her time in dirtying her fingers with coal and bits of burnt wood copying common images such as the Italian men sold about the streets, or staining clean canvas with mucky greasy coloured oils, well and good. Miss Winnifred might like this messing about, and she might do what she liked—but need

she keep such company? For the disciples of art as encountered at Mr. Swanwick's Eggleton had the most unbounded contempt.

'I'd carry no more than a little loose silver on me ; no ornaments, nor jewels, nor nothing when I went in there, mem.'

Eggleton had a seat in the passage while the lesson progressed in the studio.

'They looks a hungry and a pilfering lot. It's not for me to say a word against the company you keep, but they're not the sort I'd mix with myself, and I wonder how you can as is a real lady born.'

Not less original and peculiar than the school were the master and pupils who filled it. Swanwick was a curious creature whose chief claims to be called an instructor in art were the inheritance of a regiment of torsos from a friendly sculptor and the execution of a tremendous picture illustrating the landing of Julius Cæsar, the canvas for which was stretched in the studio and could never afterwards be removed. The work-room was long and narrow with easels drawn up in it row

behind row, so that to move from one end to another without accident was nearly impossible. At this place, upon quaint chairs made of tubs reversed and with half the staves omitted, were seated a motley crew, male and female, nondescript in costume and in style, while in talk their accents often bewrayed them. They came from all classes of life. Art, unlike the precious metals, crops up at times in widely distinct strata; its gifts are scattered up and down and lodge in uncertain corners, setting all rules and reasoning at defiance.

Among these students at Swanwick's were many whose appearance Winnifred thoroughly enjoyed. Ladies who adopted fashions of their own, remarkable coiffures copied from the Greeks or Romans, bringing their hair low down on their foreheads or massing it on top of their heads, as though bent upon a visit to the amphitheatre to cry 'habet' and turn down their thumbs. Some scorned all artifice as they called it, and pruned down their garments with such severe simplicity

that nature, whether exuberant or niggard, was left unmistakably revealed. The men were more reasonable, but they also had a tendency to despise custom and rise superior to fashion ; to affect low hats with long coats, and with short coats tall hats ; to lean towards velvet and velveteen : to display rich harvests of hair and boots not made in the Burlington Arcade.

Yet with nearly all Winnifred soon became good friends. The women were a little distant and suspicious, perhaps, as is their wont when another woman is in the case ; but the men were courteous, deferential sometimes, never presuming, but glad to give advice, to encourage or to say nothing according to Winnifred's mood.

The day after the talk about the visit to Burcham Paddox she was seated, as usual, busily engaged at her work, when the talk of two young fellows, who sat not far off and gossiped together, fell upon her ear and interested her not a little.

A familiar name—that of ‘Gwynne’—first attracted her attention. ‘Nick Gwynne’ they called him, and spoke of him as if they knew him intimately well; already he was a bit of a hero with the rising generation of artists, especially with such as, like himself, had been or still were draughtsmen on the wood.

‘Yes: Nick Gwynne won’t draw for them much longer. He’s getting too big for it. His work is too good and his time’s too precious.’

‘And they have promised you a billet on the “News”?’

‘As soon as he leaves them. He is bound to do one more turn—down at Smokingham—he’s going as “special,” next week.’

‘What’s up there?’

‘A royal visit or something. Great ball and a great rejoicing; one of the princes is to open a new town hall.’

‘I wonder Nick Gwynne can spare the time. This is January—not two months to

"sending in." Has he got his picture well on? Has anyone seen it? Have you?'

'I just have. Talk of royal princes, this is a royal picture.'

'Painted for royalty?'

'Not at all; but it's grand. It *will* open all their eyes. He's come out stronger than any of us could have expected: done a splendid thing.'

'What's it all about?'

'Tennyson's "Lotos Eaters." Procession of girls coming to greet the warriors, and a landscape behind that makes you cry——'

'Like an onion?'

'That's about it. But poetry's not the name for it.'

'Prose then?'

'Get out! You just see it, then you'll know. I tell you it's grand. If I could have that picture to hang at the end of my studio, I shouldn't want any heaven. That would do for me, unless I could take the picture out of the world with me.'

'Is he well on with it?'

‘Three quarters finished.’

‘How can he afford to go and leave it now?’

‘They make a point of his going; the “News” people do, and Christison wrote offering to put him up. I wish Christison would ask me to stay with him. I’d go in a special train full of packing cases, which I’d leave with him.’

Christison was an enterprising dealer having large dealings in London who yet made Smokingham his head quarters. He knew his own business and where it could best be done. One of his special attributes, and that which was fast making his fortune, was an unerring forecast of a painter’s fame. He was disposed to buy up Dominic body and soul, if Dominic would only sell himself.

‘Christison knows what he’s about. If Gwynne only plays his cards well his fortune is as good as made.’

‘He is on the high road; but it will be slow travelling. He produces so little.’

‘So much the better. What he turns out

is first-rate. You'll see. Mark my words ; he'll be one of our greatest painters, if he lives.'

'Amen,' said the other ; 'with all my heart ;' and there was another echo not less fervent to his prayer.

That afternoon towards dusk, Winnifred came in to Lady Clementina's private room and sat down bent clearly on being affable.

'When do you go to Burcham Paddox ?'

'On the 22nd. Are you still obstinately determined to refuse the invitation ?'

'Well, no ; I've been thinking it over. I believe I should rather like the change. You've not written to Lord FitzHugh ?'

'He does not reach England till the end of the week. Am I to accept, then, for you too ?'

'Yes : if you will be so kind.'

'I forbear to enquire what has worked this salutary change in your mind, Winnifred. But I'm glad you've come to your senses, and your father will be equally pleased.'

All Colonel Forsyth said when he heard it was—

‘Why this sudden change?’

Why this sudden change indeed? Did she know herself? Was she going to Bur-cham for no other reason than because Dominic Gwynne would be close at hand, and perchance they might meet again? If anyone had asserted this she would have stoutly repudiated the charge.

And yet in her own heart she felt most eager to speak a few words to him—half-a-dozen, no more—just to beg his pardon—to ask him to forgive her, to tell him that perhaps, if he still wished it——

No, she would not commit herself again. It was better to forget what happened. All she wished was to be friends with him as before.

CHAPTER II.

THE guests at Burcham Paddox had been carefully selected and were very few in number. There was first and foremost the Royalty, whom it would be indiscreet to mention further, his presence must be taken as indicated rather than described ; the Duke of Hammersmith came next, but he ranked always after his wife, being in every way number two to the duchess, who had been a celebrated beauty in her time, since when nature, by way of readjustment, had stricken her with two plain and decidedly uninteresting daughters ; then Lord Yellowborough, a young peer whose tendencies were, according to himself, towards a sensuous æstheticism, who had earned already, whether by accident or from real predilection, an unpleasant repu-

tation ; but as he was rich, unmarried, and his own master, society was very gentle to his failings. Other guests were Dr. and Mrs. Burmester, whom we have met before, acceptable people of the colourless class who are added to parties as water is to prescriptions to dilute them and keep the other ingredients in solution ; Beau Burton, the Prince's equerry, a matter-of-fact, long-headed young soldier of fortune ; and last of all, Mr. Crammersh, the local celebrity, who had been invited as a mark of respect to Smockingham city.

The Forsyths were of course among the first arrivals. Lady Clementina was in the fidgets ; Colonel Forsyth foreboding all sorts of evils ; Winnifred a little nonchalant, half regretting now that she had agreed to come.

‘ Well, FitzHugh, I wish you well out of it all. What will they do for you ? They must give you a ribbon. The Thistle now, or something of that sort ? ’

‘ I want nothing for doing my duty, Forsyth. It's my duty as lord-lieutenant to

take the lead on this occasion, and I'm right glad to have the opportunity.'

He was a tall man with very long arms, which he was in the habit of waving about—he had learnt the trick in the House—like a windmill in full blast. Now he stood with them behind his back, then with a flourish he brought them to the front and folded them magnificently, lowering his head upon his chest and looking up at you from under his eyebrows as though he was doubtful whether he ought to swear eternal friendship or knock you down.

'And it's a high honour,' he went on.

'Oh, of course, I quite appreciate *that*,' Colonel Forsyth admitted. 'But I mean to say, that when a man turns his house upside down and all that, and puts himself out of the way, he ought to have some reward—only he seldom gets it.'

'Virtue is its own reward,' said Lady Clementina, drawing as usual upon the copy-books.

‘When do you expect people to arrive, Lord FitzHugh?’ Winnifred asked.

‘Most come to-morrow. Lord Yellowborough is here. Mr. Crammersh arrives in time for dinner to-night. The Prince will only appear the day previous and goes on the third day.’

‘Then the festivities will not be unduly protracted. There is some comfort in that. State ceremonies cannot be amusing to the performers, except perhaps upon the stage. I should rather like to play a tragedy queen in cotton velvet and a pasteboard crown which I could take off when I was tired.’

‘You will have to perform for us, Miss Winnifred, here.’

‘And in what capacity, may it please your Lordship?’

‘On this occasion as a charming young lady who means to do her best to please my guests.’

Winnifred made him a low curtsy.

‘Meaning, my Lord, that the part of

charming is not natural to me but only assumed at will? Thank you.'

'We will ask your partners after the ball.'

'I have given up dancing. I have taken leave of all the frivolities of life.'

'Of your senses, I think,' growled Colonel Forsyth.

'What does she mean?' Lord FitzHugh asked of his sister. Although slow of apprehension and desperately pompous, he was of a kindly nature, and he liked Winnifred after his cold undemonstrative fashion. 'Surely I am not to gather from her remarks that she is about to withdraw from the world?'

'There are more worlds than one,' replied Winnifred for herself. 'My world in future is to be the world of art.'

'A more absurd fad I never came across,' cried her father.

'Only a transitory fancy, although there can be no great harm in following art seriously,' said Lady Clementina.

'A pretty toy enough,' Lord FitzHugh

remarked patronisingly, as he might congratulate a child of ten upon the flaxen locks of her doll.

‘Fortunately you will find congenial spirits amongst us. Lord Yellowborough is artistic, I believe, and Mr. Crammersh has a collection of modern pictures reputed one of the finest in the three kingdoms. He gives enormous prices, so I’m told.’

‘Perhaps he will buy one of mine while they’re cheap.’

‘Surely you would not paint for money?’

‘I have heard of ladies who do it for love.’

‘At least Miss Forsyth’s colour is not artificial,’ said Lord FitzHugh gallantly.

‘I’d far rather you praised the colour of my pictures, Lord FitzHugh.’

‘We’ll leave that to Lord Yellowborough; he is a judge or pretends to be one, which is better.’

‘Where is he? I think you said he had arrived?’ Lady Clementina asked.

‘He said he thought of spending the

afternoon in the picture gallery. There is a Carpaccio there—you know it, Clementina, the reception of the Venetian ambassadors by the English king—which he admires excessively, and he meant to copy it or a part of it.'

'Lord Yellowborough is a worker, then?' Winnifred said with some animation. 'Is he clever at it?'

'That's as may be. Not according to my taste, but he pleases himself I think.'

'As he can afford to do,' put in Colonel Forsyth. 'He can waste his time on any vagary he chooses to take up.'

This was meant for Winnifred's benefit.

'Shall we go and see what progress he makes?' suggested Lady Clementina; and escorted by Lord FitzHugh, the ladies went up the grand oak staircase and along a wide corridor into the picture gallery, which had once been the banquetting hall.

Down at the far end was a slight, pale-faced young man standing in a quaint attitude. His legs were crossed, his arms behind his back, and his head turned so as to

peer sideways over his shoulder at a small canvas upon an easel. The upper part of him was archaic in costume, the lower nautical. The Norfolk jacket of dark purple velvet cut like a Vandyke doublet, the large low shirt collar and lace-fringed tie like a peruke, would have done for an old picture, while the trousers very short and purposely preposterously wide at the bottom, to show off the smallness of his feet, gave him the appearance of a stage sailor about to dance a hornpipe. His face was not seen at its best in profile ; the forehead retreated too much, and so did the chin, although long locks of reddish hair came low down upon the former, and the latter was covered by a small peaky beard.

The entrance of his visitors disturbed his *pose*, and he advanced with a mincing step to be introduced.

'So glad to know you, Lord Yellowborough. Your dear father and mother were especial friends of mine. You have not been back in England long ?'

There was no reference to the escapade which had led to his absence.

‘No: a few weeks only. From Japan. Perhaps you know Japan?’ He spoke of it as if it were in the next street, and people could go there and back any day without putting on their bonnets.

‘We have not been there so often or so much as we should have liked,’ Winnifred said. ‘Perhaps next autumn——’

‘D’licious place.’ Delicious was a favourite expression of his pronounced in this abbreviated form.

‘When shall we start, Lady Clementina?’ Winnifred went on, trying to mystify her step-mother.

‘Start? For Japan?’ Lord FitzHugh looked very much surprised. ‘Surely, Clementina, you have no intention of going there at present?’

‘I don’t understand Winnifred in the least. The question was never mooted till this moment. I have no desire to go abroad again just yet.’

‘I presume you learned to paint in Japan?’ Winnifred said as soon as she had inspected Lord Yellowborough’s work.

‘Oh no, not quite there.’

‘In China perhaps?’

‘Well, to tell you the truth, no.’ He was far too well protected by native conceit to perceive that she was chaffing him.

‘I studied in Rome, and in Paris. That may perhaps explain my method. They tell me my execution is good, as good as needs be.’

‘It is indeed masterly,’ Lady Clementina cried ecstatically. Then heaving a deep sigh, she added, ‘Would that I also could paint in oils like that! How you excel! how you shine! Doesn’t Lord Yellowborough shine, Winnifred?’

‘Very much so indeed,’ she replied; but to herself she said that she could see her face in his canvas.

‘And what an accurate eye you must have! You have copied Carpaccio quite exactly.’

The study was of a tree-top with a bird on

the topmost bough ; behind a high horizon line, and near it a mediæval ship under oar and sail. Lord Yellowborough had given every detail, every leaf, every feather, every rope with unflinching precision.

‘ My effort is to compass absolute imitative truthfulness.’

‘ That of course you learnt in Japan ? And this is how you ensure it ? ’ Winnifred pointed to a microscope, opera-glasses, foot-rule, and many mathematical instruments.

‘ Naturally, I cannot trust my hand.’

‘ I call that drawing by machinery,’ Winnifred said. And then she thought of this little creature’s puny efforts when compared to the freedom and command over material which Dominic Gwynne displayed. Then almost involuntarily she passed on to make other comparisons between the painter, with his fine frame and vigorous *physique*, and this fragile effeminate peer.

‘ I put accuracy above everything.’

‘ Very praiseworthy of you,’ said Lady Clementina.

'You may carry it too far, though. It's not my way,' Winnifred confessed.

'You paint, then?' and Lord Yellowborough looked at her with increased interest as a kindred spirit. The freshness of her beauty, her sparkling eyes, and upright independent carriage had strongly impressed him, and now came identity in tastes to increase her attractiveness. His glance was short and furtive, but it did not escape Lady Clementina.

Only Winnifred continued profoundly unconscious. What did she care whether Lord Yellowborough was disposed to admire her or not? He should get no encouragement from her.

And it was with the same feelings that she encountered Mr. Crammersh when he, later that evening, offered himself up as a new victim to be bound to her wheels.

He had kept them waiting for dinner some time. But then he had had much to see to at Smokingham and had thus been delayed. He was always full of business, and,

as he said, he saw to everything himself. This, in truth, was the secret of his success, this and his acutely suspicious nature, which led him to take people's measure as though they were rogues. His manner was in a way an outward mark of the ideas which possessed him. He was never at ease, never quiet for a moment. Now, he put his hand to his head to see if his hair was still on, thinking perhaps he was surrounded by red Indians sworn to scalp him; next, to his watch-chain, as though the venue was changed and everyone around him was a thief. Anon, he placed his arms akimbo, as though you had called him a liar or thought him a fool, and he was daring you to prove your words.

A broadly built, somewhat coarsely proportioned man, with a large head, full lips, cheeks rather red and mottled, eyes staring with a look of surprise in them, as if perpetually on the look-out for ghosts.

He was well prepared with set phrases prepared evidently in advance.

'Thank you,' he said, to Lord FitzHugh

for introducing him to the two ladies, with both of whom he insisted on shaking hands. 'Thank you, this is indeed an honour. Your ladyship is looking charming; and Miss, Miss—Forsyth, thank you,' like a new bid given to an auctioneer in doubt, 'Miss Forsyth doubtless finds no ill effects from the immediate neighbourhood of our smoky town? It certainly has had no injurious effects on your complexion.'

Winnifred gave a short bow, and seemed doubtful whether she was to be offended or not. Fulsome compliment had never come in her way much. It is not quite good manners, and of all her legion of admirers none were cads enough to administer flattery in doses better suited to the servants' hall.

When dinner was announced and it fell to her lot to go in with Mr. Crammersh, she thought it hardly necessary to remain on speaking terms with him, and it was some time before she joined in with the conversation.

‘How are the preparations going on?’ Lord FitzHugh asked.

Mr. Crammersh was the chairman of the Festivities Committee.

‘We’re doing it to rights, my Lord, I can tell you. There was a hitch about money, but that could not be allowed to stand in the way, of course; on such occasions we must put our hands into our pockets.’

He spoke as one who had scattered his gold broadcast.

‘Money is only useful for what it will buy,’ Lady Clementina said, improving the occasion.

‘So I say, and I never grudge a cheque for anything on which I set my heart. Now for a picture if it pleases me I’m ready to pay anything at all.’

‘Have you been adding much to your collection of late?’ Winnifred asked, waking up. ‘I hear you have many fine pictures.’

‘I buy largely every year. It’s the best investment in the world.’

‘Is it now?’ said Colonel Forsyth rather interested. ‘How comes that?’

‘The pictures eat nothing, and they increase in value at compound interest. My collection is worth ever so much more than I paid for it.’

‘Perhaps you will give me your opinion on one or two of mine?’ Lord FitzHugh said.

‘Ancient, ain’t they? Modern art’s my line of country. None of your old masters for me. They’re old enough to know better. No Rafaels nor Mewrillers for me: a good honest Academician’s work with a sound market value—that’s my caper.’

‘What have you got? Do you lean to any school?’ asked Lord Yellowborough, civilly.

‘No school nor yet college. I know what I like and I buy what I like. There’s——, and ——,’ he ran off half a dozen well-known names.

‘Do you buy them by the gross?’ Lord Yellowborough enquired.

‘No, my Lord, I don’t. They’re not to be had in that way?’

‘Indeed, I didn’t know. They’re mostly of one pattern, and equally, if I may be permitted to say so, equally inferior. I would not give one inch of Sandro Boticelli or a single scrap of Filippo Lippi for the whole Academy Exhibition year after year.’

‘Never heard of your friends. Foreigners I presume. Get hung at Wallis’s. That’s where it is, my Lady; how can we expect our English painters to improve, if we encourage French foreigners and others from beyond the water? These fellows ought not to be allowed to come over and crowd our markets.’

‘There is not much fear of that. My friends are both dead and have been these centuries past.’

‘Old masters, are they?’ Mr. Crammersh was quite unabashed. ‘I wish you joy of them. No: give me something I know, by some one I know, who can come into court and swear to his own signature if asked.

Your old masters can't do that, so you're never safe. Half of those about are no better than cheats.'

'I should be sorry to think that of some I prize,' Lord FitzHugh said gravely.

'Oh but those have been in the possession of the family for generations,' said Lady Clementina. 'There can be no question about them.'

'Well, I don't know,' said Crammersh with native caution ; 'at any rate, my money don't go for such like. I may be right, or I may be wrong, or I may not be the right person to say so, but I would not give sixpence for the whole bunch. I know what I like.'

'In which direction does your fancy lie ?' Winnifred asked. 'Landscape, genre, battle-pieces, flowers, academic or sacred art ?'

'I like nature—the correct representation of nature. You must give me what's natural.'

'Nothing's so natural as the artificial, don't you think ?' Winnifred put it slyly.

'Quite so.' Crammersh saw no trap.

‘That’s what I think, and so I know what I like. Good light and shade I must have, and colour, lots of colour, and, and——’

‘Form?’ suggested Winnifred.

‘Certainly form, good form—and——’

‘Handling?’

‘Handling,’ of course, finished handling——’

‘And technical excellence?’

‘I couldn’t do without it. It’s a chief point with me. Technical excellence, certainly;’ and Crammersh looked at Winnifred with positive gratitude for the words she had put into his mouth.

‘And where, pray, do you find such qualities combined in any one man to-day?’

‘There are some good men about too, Lord Yellowborough,’ said Lady Clementina by way of protest. ‘There’s Leighton, and Millais, and Sant, and Sir Francis, and—many others.’

‘Many others indeed, my Lady,’ added Crammersh. ‘Ask the dealers, ask Christison; he ought to know if anybody does.’

‘What sort of a dealer is he? honest?’

asked Colonel Forsyth, who had paid no particular attention and only woke up at the last word. 'I'm looking out for a couple of nags for a mail phaeton.'

If you wanted a pair of Correggios or a nice little bit of Turner, he'd be the very man, father. But not for horse-flesh.'

'What's he deal in, then?'

'Pictures.'

'Photos and prints, and all that?'

All the table smiled.

'All that, and something more, father. Canvases which cost hundreds and hundreds of pounds.'

'I paid him seventeen thousand myself last year,' said Crammersh with that mock humility which is the most objectionable form of ostentation.

'For pictures?' enquired Colonel Forsyth. To him it was quite inconceivable. He would not have given a box of Partagas or a dozen of Château Yquem for the finest Raphael in the world.

'Yes; I buy entirely through him now.'

‘And upon his judgment, I presume?’

‘No, my Lord, I claim to have some voice in the matter. He used to be rather dictatorial, recommending this man, pushing forward that, but I wouldn’t have it, and now I choose mostly for myself. Only last year he tried to palm off a new hand, but I resisted. A young fellow, one Gwynne, Dominic Gwynne. No one had heard his name, and I would not bite. “Promising,” said Christison. “I daresay,” I said. “But I don’t want promise, I want performance. Tell him to call again later on,” and that was an end of Master Gwynne.’

‘Gwynne! Gwynne!’ cried Lady Clementina, turning the name over on the tip of her tongue. ‘To be sure, I know him. We met him abroad last summer. Tall, conceited, but gentlemanlike. Surely you remember him, Winnifred?’

‘If I didn’t, your description would of course recall him.’

‘Oh, if he’s a friend of your ladyship’s he deserves a helping hand.’ Crammersh liked

the *rôle* of patron. 'Christison shall find out what he's at, and I'll take it off his hands. His prices won't hurt anyone yet awhile, and it may give him a lift if it's known he's sold to me. Yes, I'll have it, if it's worth anything at all, that's to say.'

'It's likely to be worth, some day, as much or more than anything you've got,' Winnifred said, quite hotly.

'Indeed; you have a high opinion of his talent?' asked Lord FitzHugh, blandly.

The eagerness with which Winnifred had spoken had attracted attention. But she would not go back, however much she might regret her warmth.

'It's more than talent, genius is the word. Ask Lady Clementina, she's a better judge than I am.'

'Modesty never answers in a critic,' interpolated Lord Yellowborough. 'Without downright assertion he fails to secure a hearing.'

'I certainly thought he would go far—I asked him to draw my dear doggie for me.'

‘That would send me far enough,’ said Colonel Forsyth. ‘Are you fond of dogs, Lord Yellowborough?’

The colonel was unutterably bored by all this art talk, and would gladly have got upon sporting dogs, and pug dogs, and pet dogs, and dogs of sorts.

‘I liked them stewed.’

‘That was in China, I suppose,’ Winnifred said, rather amused. ‘Lady Clementina, will you give us Fido in a fricassee?’

‘The sweet pet! how you can suggest such a horror!’

‘As you’ve got his portrait, it wouldn’t matter.’

‘I have three rather fine Landseers, all dogs,’ said Crammersh. ‘I wish your ladyship could see them.’

‘Nothing would give me greater pleasure, with the rest of your collection: will you fix an early day? We might go over to Crinkle-ton, FitzHugh, if you would allow us. I so love good pictures.’

‘Pictures again!’ Colonel Forsyth was nearly desperate.

‘What do you think of prospects in Abyssinia?’ he asked Lord FitzHugh suddenly, and without waiting went on. ‘I believe things are uncommonly fishy. Nash told me, and he had it from Burgho Smith, who is in with the Duke, that Napier could not move for months to come.’

‘Poor look-out certainly.’

‘And so many mouths to feed at such a distance from the coast.’

They might be on the rates, all of them needing parish relief, from the gloominess of Colonel Forsyth’s tone.

‘Come cheer up, father ; don’t cry.’

‘It’s no joking matter, as you would say if you had friends there as I have.’

‘This is the first time I ever heard you mention them, or the Abyssinian expedition.’

‘Have you ever visited that country in all your wanderings, Lord Yellowborough?’ Lady Clementina asked.

‘ I may return by that road this year.’

‘ Surely you are not going to run away again ?’

It was an awkward expression, but no one took notice ; and Lady Clementina was ready enough to take out the sting of the remark. ‘ You do not mean to run off from London directly you have returned ? Yellowborough House has not been thrown open these five years.

‘ After this journey, Lady Clementina. But I am obliged to go to the South Seas for a time.’

‘ As a missionary, I trust ?’ Winnifred said.

‘ No,’ simpered Lord Yellowborough. ‘ Not exactly, but as a pilgrim in search of the beautiful and the true. The scenery, I am told, is paradisiacal, the climate like a poem ; the Sandwich Islanders more nearly approach the perfection of physical beauty than any race upon earth.’

‘ You might find the perfection of beauty nearer home,’ Crammersh said, with an elaborate bow towards Winnifred.

‘That man’s a cad,’ Colonel Forsyth said to himself.

‘Have you tried Switzerland?’ Winnifred asked, treating Crammersh’s remark with sublime unconcern.

‘I cannot go there, never again. The ugliness of the people is too appalling. The first group I saw gave me a fit of nervous depression which lasted several months.’

‘And the other’s nearly a fool.’

Nevertheless the substantial recommendations which backed up both kept Colonel Forsyth upon his good behaviour to them—they were excellent *partis* and in a measure entitled to his consideration and respect. He was the more vexed therefore that Winnifred should receive so coolly and so nonchalantly the attentions of both, attentions that were evident and unmistakable during the rest of the evening.

‘She takes a pleasure in being disagreeable to people, I think,’ Lady Clementina said apologetically, when alone with her husband. ‘I don’t know what’s come over her of

late. Last season it was all the other way. Then she encouraged men too much, now she oversnubs them—always one extreme or the other.'

'It's your method which is injudicious and futile.'

'She's a girl quite beyond my management, I confess, Ferdinand. I never feel safe with her. I am never free from a fear that her waywardness will not end in serious trouble to herself.'

Nor was her conduct reassuring when the house filled, and the rest of the guests arrived.

The Duchess of Hammersmith had come prepared at all costs to dislike her. Miss Forsyth's character as a coquette was sufficiently well known; she got the credit of going very much out of her way to be agreeable to men, so that other women when she was by had usually no manner of chance. The duchess was a mother with daughters neither young nor well favoured, nor was the wealth of the ducal house of Hammersmith

sufficient to provide the Ladies Goldhawk with large dowries in lieu of personal charms. They did not find suitors very readily, not of the kind they had a right to expect; and this was why the duchess was predisposed to find fault with a girl who got plenty.

But Winnifred gave her no opening. What could be said against a girl who distinctly snubbed the good *partis* and only encouraged the bad? Who magnanimously left Mr. Crammersh to Lady Adelina, and actually drove Lord Yellowborough, by ridicule and scornful contempt, into Lady Millicent's arms? Who might be said to keep all the men at a distance, were it not, that by way of relaxation—or perhaps to keep her hand in—she permitted herself to flirt now and again with the Prince's equerry or His Royal Highness himself?

Winnifred's excuse to herself was that there could be mistake or misunderstanding about these two. The Prince, to begin with, was quite a boy, and besides, only by Act of Parliament could he have obtained permis-

sion to address her ; while as for Major Burton, he was publicly known as a detrimental, a pariah quite beyond the pale of matrimonial possibilities. He hadn't sixpence beyond his stipend from the Board of Green Cloth and his military pay. The margin left when he had paid for his aiguillettes and feathers was not wide enough to cover the cost of cab-hire, much less of a wife.

Major Burton and she had not met before, but the Beau knew all about her, of course. He was a courtier by profession, and it is the business of such as he to know every man, woman, and child belonging to the great world, personally, or at least all about them. He was not himself of lofty lineage, but he had inherited that mother-wit which is a far more valuable possession than an historic name. A quaint comical-looking little man was Beau Burton. He had bright quick eyes which had the knack of showing a good deal of their whites, as if asking you perpetually to look for the green in them ; a comical, wrinkled, hairless face, nose rather

turned up, thin lips, teeth not very regular, and his tongue had a trick of getting against them when he talked, which gave you the notion that he lisped. In his studiously quiet dress, always a little behind the fashion, his self-possessed 'leery' ways, he was an interesting specimen of the old young man certain to take care of himself and hold his own everywhere.

He was an immense favourite with women. Winnifred and he got on capitally together from the first. He carried the war at once into the enemy's country, and as Winnifred knew he meant nothing, it amused her immensely.

'You're an uncommon nice girl,' he said coolly the second time he spoke to her at Burcham, 'and you improve upon acquaintance.'

'Really, Major Burton, you quite overpower me. I don't see that you know me now much better than you did before.'

'I was afraid to be cooped up in the same house with you, and that's the truth. I

had been told you always made love to anybody nice.'

'Your impudence is quite refreshing, Major Burton.'

'But it's time lost with me. My mother won't let me marry.'

'I wonder she lets you go out anywhere by yourself, you're so young and inexperienced.'

'Why don't you make up to Yellowborough, now? He's worth a pot, and he's dying to be friends—or the cotton-spinner? There's a chance; a widower, I'm told, with no incumbrances. Half the girls in the town would be wild to catch him.'

'I belong to the other half. I never use the lasso. On the contrary.'

'You have to beat them off with your umbrella; is that it? Well, that's good fun, I daresay, while it lasts. But mind you don't miss your shy.'

'Miss my shy, Major Burton? Is that the language of the Court or the Camp?'

'I mean that perhaps you'll leave it

too long. Better make hay—you know the rest.'

'You're extremely kind, but has our acquaintance been sufficiently long to entitle you to give me advice? Perhaps you will allow me to be the best judge of my own affairs.'

Winnifred for the moment was inclined to be angry with him.

'All right, only don't say I didn't tell you,' said the Beau quite unmoved. 'I take an interest in you, I do, upon my word. You're better than most of them about, and I'd like to see you settled, I would—'pon my word I would.'

Winnifred made him a short curtsy.

'If you want a helping hand at any time, Miss Forsyth, you come to me. I'm not a bad chap at heart.'

It was also very difficult to know whether the Beau was in earnest or not. Winnifred looked at him sharply to test the real value of the sentiment he professed. His quaint imperturbable little face was too well under command to betray him, generally, but just

now there was a twinkle of sympathy in his steady eyes and his firmly set lips were relaxed into a small smile.

‘ Perhaps I shall remind you of your promise some day,’ Winnifred said, seriously, and left him.

After that, friendliness greatly increased between them. Others, indeed, noticed it and fancied it had its roots in a warmer feeling. The young Prince rallied his equerry good-humouredly upon his inability to resist the fascinations of Miss Forsyth. Lord Yellowborough wondered how any sensible girl could stand an empty-headed shallow soldier. Mr. Crammersh also was nettled and sore. He too had taken a strong fancy for Winnifred, although she seldom threw him a word.

But the people most concerned were Lady Clementina and Colonel Forsyth. The latter was very much put out indeed; he vowed that in this case Winnifred’s waywardness was past all bearing. Beau Burton was a mere hanger-on, a penniless soldier. He

might live on the fat of the land, but it was at other people's expense. It was well known he could never marry, and the girl who made herself remarkable with him did herself no good. She appeared ridiculous, or worse. Winnifred must be told to keep Major Burton at a distance. His attentions were becoming too marked. What was still worse was Winnifred's pleasure at receiving them.

She turned a deaf ear to all that was said to her. It was just the way, she declared, to drive her to the other extreme. At present she liked Major Burton only a little; if they thwarted and opposed her, she would like him very much indeed.

Then her father and mother began to regret they had come to Burcham Paddox. Before the visit was over they found other reasons for wishing they had stayed away.

CHAPTER III.

CROWDS fill the sloppy streets of Smokingham. Everybody is pressing towards a central point where stands the new town hall.

A moving mass of rough-voiced, hard-handed folk, who have taken one holiday out of a week of toil and are enjoying it boisterously. There is rough horse-play among the men, jokes are accompanied by pleasant back-handed blows that would fell an ox. The language used is, to say the least, strong. The scene has no pretensions to the picturesque. The costumes are as conventionally ugly as modern dress can be; sombre in hue except where, here and there, the female sex, with innate love of finery, sport kerchiefs and scraps of incongruous colours—red, blue, and green, with yellow ribbons and magenta

skirts. These gay but garish points of light scarcely relieve the prevailing leaden grey tones; the sky is lowering, the buildings black with accumulated deposits of smoke and grime, the very rain of heaven as it descends loses its crystal clearness and turns into sooty mud.

Little here, as at first sight would appear, to attract the painter. The scene upon the surface is dull, commonplace, vulgar; but for those who care to look deeper this populous overcrowded centre of vast industrial enterprise, one of the bulwarks of the commercial wealth of the nation, has a sentiment all its own. These uncouth operatives, having in their outward aspect little to recommend them to the æsthetic mind, have nevertheless a claim to respect. They have proved that they possessed rare virtues upon great occasions; as, when widespread famine from causes beyond their control crushed them with awful woe, they bore their burden with a silent fortitude that won for them the admiration of the world; or yet again when in support of

principles misguided perhaps but earnestly believed in, they faced, whole thousands of them, the privations of pinching want, the tearful agony of those dearest to them crying out for food, and held out courageously to the bitter end.

Such thoughts as these rose unbidden in the mind of Dominic Gwynne as he passed, note-book in hand, in and out among the throng ; threading here a labyrinth of streets built all upon one monotonous model, catching a glimpse now and again of squalid courts or dark alleys, pitying from his heart the hapless inmates doomed to live on from year's end to year's end with but a short glimpse at long intervals of the sun, with but a scanty knowledge of the ever-changing beauties of the sky of heaven. What notion had they, except as indistinctly pictured in books, of the real loveliness of landscape, of trees full branching, of sunny copse or flowery dell, of the multitudinous ocean, of the placid stream flowing to the sea amid lush meadows dappled with browsing kine ?

Some day, Dominic thought, he would paint a picture here in the heart of this weird unlovely Black Country, seeking to do justice to the sentiment by which its grimness was underlaid. A sickly child, say in a garret in one of these gloomy dens worshipping reverently a single snowdrop in a battered mug ; or the bread-winner on strike ; in his empty cheerless home, torn by conflicting emotions, on one side his little ones at their last gasp, at the other the noisy oily-tongued delegates preaching endurance and dogged continuance of the fight in face of every odds.

Lingering and loitering thus the time slipped by till suddenly amid cheers and rejoicings the Royal *cortège* clattered up the street, a glittering pageant : scarlet liveries, gilt coaches, gay uniforms, dresses resplendent and many hued standing out in strong contrast to the sombre tints of the dingy town.

Then Dominic remembered that he was behind-hand ; that he ought long before this to have taken his place among the represen-

tatives of the Press, and so prepared to hurry on.

The string of carriages passed, one by one. Here the Prince and the Mayor, there big wigs of all sorts and sizes ; he had seen none of them before, and never wanted to see any of them again.

Never ? He checked himself suddenly, for there, in the last carriage but one, to his intense surprise he caught sight of a face which, in spite of all, was never a moment absent from his thoughts.

Winnifred Forsyth ! Here in Smokingham, and one of the royal party ! Of course. It was only his own stupidity. He ought to have remembered. Christison, Dominic's host, had mentioned that the Prince was to be entertained at Lord FitzHugh's, and this was the brother-in-law of whom Lady Clementina in times past had spoken more than once.

With lords and ladies, associating with princes, with dukes doubtless at her feet, with swells of the first water around her ;

this was how he encountered her again. And this was the girl whom he had fancied once was ready to stoop to take him, Dominic Gwynne, the unknown painter, whose name was still to earn, who had no fortune but his brains and his skilful hands. He realised now in its full meaning how wide was the gulf that divided them; now with a sigh, long drawn and sad, he confessed to himself that she was utterly beyond his reach, that his case was hopeless and without a prospect of cure.

But he must see her again, if only for one moment,—one other glimpse of her face and then he would resign all thought of her, would shut out her image for ever and ever from his heart.

The crowd was thickest about the Town Hall, and with difficulty he made his way to the private entrance set apart for himself and his colleagues. Even here the police barred his way till he produced his pass, 'On the Press,' potent sesame which few portals nowadays can resist. He was too late to find a

front place. The narrow gallery was full, and other 'specials' sharper than himself had taken up their posts hours before.

It was rather a joke with them that the 'picture' correspondent, to whom seeing was indispensable, should be kept out of the show, and in the few moments that passed before the ceremony began, Dominic had to stand a volley of chaff. One guessed that this time at least the sketches for the 'News' would be done in Fleet Street and not upon the spot; another told Dominic that as idealisation was his forte, *he* could invent something far superior to anything *they* saw. A third said he'd make charge for allowing his back to be introduced in the foreground of Dominic's 'double page' drawing; several ironically offered to give up their seats, but neglected altogether to move.

Dominic laughed with the others at first, and tried to bear his disappointment with composure. It was not the ceremony he missed—a very few details jotted down by-and-by would suffice for that—but to be so

near her and not to see her! This gradually increased his despair till his face displayed unmistakable chagrin. Presently little Tom Hamperson, who wanted only short 'copy,' looked round in an idle moment, and seeing Dominic's look pitied him.

'Here, Nick, you can have my place. I'm going out to "wire." I can write all the rest at the office.'

And thus, at the eleventh hour, Dominic got into the front row. The reporters were right opposite the dais and had a capital view. The platform crowded with dignitaries, the youthful Prince, the Mayor bowing obsequiously over the heads of the great magnates of the county and town; beyond Lady Clementina's jubilant face, her teeth glittering like lights in an illumination. All this he took in at a glance, then his eye wandered rapidly over the crowd, seeking high and low, up and down among the countenances mostly new and strange to him, the one face he was yearning to behold.

Yes; there she was. Dressed in exqui-

site taste, all smiles and good humour, a man on each side of her, both apparently intimate and on the best of terms with her. Anon this one whispers a few words. She laughs with undisguised glee; then that one, as if on his mettle, essays a word or two, at which she turns her eyes on him with beaming encouragement, as if she wished him to say something more of the same kind. Then a small man in a bright red coat glittering with gold, carrying a cocked hat under his arm, came from where he had been standing behind the Prince, and spoke to her.

She greeted him with warmth, smiling far more kindly on him than on the others.

‘Who’s that chap?’ Dominic growled to a brother-reporter at his elbow.

‘That? Burton of course. The equery. Where have you been hiding yourself the last year or two not to know him by sight? Why, he’s always at every show.’

‘Burton? What is he? What’s he do?’

‘Fight.’

‘Fight whom?’

‘Anybody. He’s a major, man, a soldier-officer, by profession. But they call him the Beau, and I take it he’s more of a ladies’ man than a man of war. That girl seems to fancy him—above a bit.’

‘Flirt, coquette, heartless, cold-blooded.’ All this and more Dominic hurled at her, endorsing now to the full Guy Greatorex’s opinion of her which he had so long been loath to believe; nor was his temper towards her soothed, when, seemingly in return to a query of hers, the major pointed out the Press enclosure opposite, and Winnifred stared across hard at all the men therein.

Did she see him? thought Dominic. Surely she must. She seemed to be passing the whole number under review; once he thought her eyes caught his, so that his heart went pit-a-pat and the blood rushed to his face—should he bow? No; let her make the first move. While he hesitated her gaze had passed on. She had cut him then, dead.

With bitterness in his heart he gathered up his notes, bundled them hastily into his pocket, and hurried off to Christison's house. He would pack up his traps and return forthwith to town. Distance, miles, seas, continents, must be placed without delay between him and Winnifred Forsyth.

It was all very well, but Christison would by no means consent to this sudden departure. Christison was very fond of Dominic, loved him like a son, he said.

'What, hurry away like this? It's quite out of the question.'

He was a dogmatic, rather rough-spoken gentleman, who said what he thought without circumlocution. An over-grown flabby-faced man, having keen eyes, however, and fingers which, if fat, were hooked like claws ready to hold fast all they caught up.

He was a modest man, he said, who did not attempt to cut any dash. Had his way to make still. By-and-by, when his ships came in freighted with the brains and best efforts of the men who were his slaves, he

would have his glass houses and his pineries, his barouches, and a private picture-gallery of his own. Meanwhile he was content to live over his shop, the shop in which he had begun business as a carver and gilder, working, himself, with gold-leaf and sise till by degrees he learnt the value of the works he was set to adorn. He had the wit to appreciate one or two small treasures, and turned money on them; presently he dug out a toiling genius, still unknown, and bought him body and soul, advanced him cash, and got the promise of everything his *protégé* painted for years. This he found by far the most paying business, especially as he had an intuitive talent for discerning budding talent. This was why he had taken such a fancy to Dominic Gwynne.

‘I can’t part with you, not yet awhile, my boy,’ repeated Christison affectionately.

‘It’s imperative; my things are packed.’

‘Then they must be unpacked, double quick, Dominic. He was already on terms of christian names with all his painter friends,

except perhaps with the R.A.s. themselves, but then his business dealings with them were smaller as he preferred the younger men. 'I couldn't think of it. And you've promised to go to the ball, and my missus wants you to dance the first Caledonians with her.'

'Very important business calls me to town.'

'And more important calls on you to stop. You'll get an offer to-night, most like, for the "Lotos Eaters;" or I shall for you. There—and what's more, Crammersh, that Crammersh, one of the biggest buyers on the continent or off it, wants to know you—there again.'

'I can't help that, he must wait.'

'He'll be offended, and he's one of my best customers. Come, Dominic, to oblige me. Besides, he a big chap—might do you no end of good; you don't know what he is. They say he owns half the London papers, and that he keeps half a dozen Academicians, out and out, all on his own hook, pays their food and lodging and gives them pocket-money—

it's well some one does, for I wouldn't—and he's hand in glove with the hangers, and a word from him will always get you a good place. It's a great chance, you mustn't lose it.'

'Well, if you make such a point of it,'—Dominic said at length, very reluctantly.

'I do, Nick. I do. He's tetchy, above a bit, and he's worth a mine of gold to me, quite a Gold-conder.' It might have been a sort of comparative instead of a diamond mine. 'And he's so suspicious. If after what I'd said you did not show up, he'd make sure we'd gone over to the enemy.'

'He has enemies, then?'

'Rich men have 'em always like gout and the shingles; but these are only rivals, jealous chaps who would pay any price to buy a picture over his head. He hates that more than anything; would outbid the Emperor of Morocco sooner than let them have what he wanted; and he's got to be humoured. Played proper, like I did with him when I sold him those Coxes.'

‘Water colours?’

‘Yes, splendid bits. I went to him, d’ye see, with a bit of Nichol, as he’d ordered, and I got for him a-purpose all right and proper. I took it over to Crinkleton in a fly, and on the roof had two large packing cases.

“‘What’s them?’” says he. “‘Oh, pictures,” says I quite shortly. Did he think I went hawking about tomb-stones or eight-day clocks? “‘Pictures,” I says, “but they won’t do for you.” “‘Why not?’” he says. “‘Too dear,” I says. “‘I am going over to Mr. Stirks with ’em.” “‘He can’t pay a better price than I can. Let me see them.” “‘They are as good as promised, and they’d never suit you.” “‘I will see them,” he says; and as he made such a point of it he did, and bought ’em. But he’s so suspicious that it takes one as knows him to manage him. If you don’t be introduced to him he’ll think I’m up to some game.’

The end of it was Dominic went to the ball, and early in the evening got two fingers

from Mr. Crammersh. The great man was overpoweringly busy, here, there, and everywhere, but he stopped to talk a little, and treat Dominic to a few carefully concocted periods. Just as the conversation began Winifred went by, leaning on a gentleman's arm.

She looked at him fixedly. Dominic was quite conscious of it, but pretended not to see her. Had she not cut him dead that morning?

'Genuine appreciation, seasonable recognition, admirable anticipatory realisation:' these were the phrases in which Crammersh maundered on, meaning to be crushingly patronising and kind.

Dominic hardly heard a single word. He was looking after the black skirt which had swept by this time out of sight.

'Perhaps you would like to see my collection? It is instructive for a young man to see good pictures. When would it suit you to visit Crinkleton?' Dominic was quite in the clouds.

'I have Frith's great picture of the Mare's

Nest, and Alfred Montgomery's Building of London Bridge. Have you seen it ?'

'London Bridge ? certainly.'

'It was exhibited at the New York exhibition,' went on Crammersh.

'I never missed it. I wonder how they took it over ?'

'In a case, to be sure.'

'The Bridge ? Impossible.'

'I was speaking of my picture,' said Crammersh, waving his hand superbly.

'Ah, to be sure,' said Dominic. 'You have some pictures——'

At this moment Winnifred again appeared in the distance, and Dominic's attention was diverted.

'Some pictures !' Mr. Crammersh began to be quite indignant at the way he was treated. 'I should think I had.'

'And you want my opinion upon them ? All right, I'll look in to-morrow.'

The off-hand insolence of these new men was past everything.

'I don't care that for your opinion,'

Crammersh said, hotly. 'I have had dozens of the very best, and I value my own judgment, I can tell you, quite as much, as much as——'

Dominic was not listening. He was looking after Winnifred. Yes, she had turned and was coming back towards them. Was it by chance? What did she mean to do? Before he had had time to decide she was abreast of him, met his eyes full, nodded, and passed on.

A curious style of recognition.

The playful sort of nod which approximates to a wink; the little childish greeting that one small girl throws at another before they begin their game of ball or hoop. But it was a greeting which Winnifred kept only for her special favourites and friends.

But Dominic was not well informed on this point, and remained in a state of the most unsatisfactory doubt. Did it mean peace or war? Should he follow and make friends? He was like the gamester who has forsworn play and who finds himself once

more unexpectedly near the fatal board. There they lie, the cards, the glittering dice, the golden bait. Why not try his luck again? Discretion in such a case is perhaps the better part of valour; it is best to show a clean pair of heels.

Dominic had not the courage to beat a retreat; on the contrary, framing some unintelligible excuse to Crammersh, who was in truth not sorry to be well quit of him, he went after Winnifred and made as though he would speak to her. Still he did not. He only hung about her, hesitating, waiting for a sign, just the smallest encouragement to give him his cue and put him at his ease.

None came. Winnifred now seemed disposed to take no further notice of him. She stood opposite straight and upright as a young pine-tree, her head thrown back a little as was customary with her, her white shoulders gleaming the whiter for her perfectly plain black dress, slightly squared as if she was hurling defiance at all the world. One foot was pushed out an inch, no more; the

tiny tip of a soft black kid shoe, but this looked defiance too.

How well she looked ! So tall, so well-bred, such an air of finish about her, seen unmistakably in the delicacy of the nostrils and the smallness of her feet and hands. Almost without ornament too ; not a jewel, not a bracelet on her fair white arms ; dressed in a simple black frock with a few snowdrops wreathed across her hair and half hidden among the thick clustering small curls which gathered about her brow. How Dominic watched her every move ! noted every detail ! Could he doubt her ? Could he distrust that honest open face, those clear unfaltering, unclouded deep blue eyes, that merry smile, the rippling and good-humoured laugh ?

This was why she laughed.

‘ Major Burton,’ she had said to her companion, ‘ you once told me you would do me a service if I asked it of you.’

‘ Command me,’ replied the Beau, ‘ to the death.’

‘ Nothing less I expect. I want you to

go and speak to that man over there ; the tall man with the short brown beard. He's been staring at me for the last hour.'

' Am I to call him out ? '

' No. Ask him to dance the next valse with me.'

' Miss Forsyth, you haven't your match in the wide wide world. To ask a perfect stranger to dance with you——'

' How do you know he's a perfect stranger ? '

' He's not one of your legion, I know that much. I never saw him before in all my life, and I know all your admirers, at least by sight, although the list is long and the strain upon the memory severe.'

' He happens to be a very old and particular friend.'

' Who shows his intimate acquaintance by keeping you at arm's length. Wise man.'

' Are you going ? ' Winnifred said, rather pettishly.

' Certainly not. Besides, it's our dance.'

‘I won’t dance with you never again. If you won’t go, I’ll ask the Prince. Your royal master is a far better fellow than you are, and I’ll get you dismissed without a character.’

‘Are you really in earnest? What is his name? Perhaps you don’t know it.’

At which Winnifred laughed.

‘I know it, only too well. It is Gwynne. Now please, delay no longer.’

Dominic saw the Beau leave Winnifred’s side and come straight towards him. There was nothing to be afraid of, and yet he quailed rather.

‘Mr. Gwynne, I think?’

Dominic bowed.

‘You have been staring very hard at a young lady all this evening.’

The Beau spoke in a drawling rather irritating tone.

‘Really, sir,’ Dominic’s ire was immediately roused. ‘What right have you——’

‘And she has sent me—Miss Forsyth has sent me to say, that she insists——’

Dominic's eyes were opening wider and wider.

'She insists upon your dancing the next dance with her.'

While this colloquy was in progress, Winnifred watched the two men from the other side of the room. She was a prey to various emotions. Shame was uppermost directly she had despatched Major Burton on his curious errand. She was angry with herself for having made the first overtures. Her disgust increased with each moment Dominic hesitated to accept the conditions of her gracious message. She was just beginning to feel most uncomfortable when Dominic himself came to set every doubt at rest.

'I could not understand,' he blurted out, 'I thought he wanted to pick a quarrel with me. I feared you were really angry with me——'

'Forgive and forget : shall that be our starting point, Mr. Gwynne ?' Winnifred said as they shook hands.

‘Why did you cut me this morning at the Town Hall?’

‘I never saw you.’

‘I sat exactly opposite ; I faced you in the Press box. And I caught your eye once——’

‘If I had intended to cut you do you think I should have sent for you now?’ Winnifred asked simply.

Then she took his arm and they went off to dance.

‘Who is that fellow with Winnifred?’ her father asked Lord FitzHugh presently. ‘I don’t seem to know his face.’

‘Some one belonging to the town, no doubt. We must be civil to them. I am pleased she assists us. They’re not the people she would prefer, I daresay, and it’s good of her to forego her tastes.’

‘She would not do anything of the kind unless it suited her book,’ Colonel Forsyth declared. ‘I expect there’s some mystery in this.’

Half an hour later he came across his

wife and asked what had become of Winnifred.

‘I have not seen her very lately.’

‘Doesn’t she come back to you after every dance?’

‘Well, frankly, no. Hardly at all, that is to say.’

‘Is that your notion of the duties of chaperonage?’

‘The blame lies with her. Often she stays away from me the greater part of the evening. At one time I insisted she should bring me all her partners to be introduced to me, but that soon fell through.’

‘Who has been dancing with her this evening? Have you any idea?’

‘The Prince two or three times. And Lord Yellowborough who professes to hate it, and Mr. Crammersh who is only just beginning to learn.’

‘And that Major Burton, I suppose?’

‘Not that I have noticed. But I think you need not fidget about that man. She is only amusing herself with him. It’s a little

that—more, perhaps, the desire to annoy me.'

'There she goes!' exclaimed the colonel.
'Who's that man with her? She is with him again and may have been ever since I saw her last.'

Lady Clementina put up her glasses.

'Where? Oh, there? Yes, his face is familiar to me. I wonder where I have seen it. Abroad somewhere. Ah, of course. It's Mr. Gwynne.'

'What Gwynnes does he belong to? Sir Cecil and that lot?'

'Oh no, to none you ever heard of. He's a painter; we met him in Italy.'

'Not that fellow Winnifred talked about so much at dinner the other night? It's just what I feared. How came you to let her know such a man? A painter!'

'He's a real artist.'

'So is my hair-dresser, and the cook at my club.'

'Not in the same way, Ferdinand; you are a little mistaken——'

‘I know what I’m talking about. I won’t have it, I say. I don’t choose to let my daughter know any such disreputable people. You must put a stop to this, Clementina. She must not dance with that fellow again. Do you quite understand?’

The colonel went off in a huff, leaving Lady Clementina very much agitated, and feeling as helpless as a hen whose brood of young ducks has just taken to the water—already, too, Winnifred and her partner had disappeared.

‘Oh, Major Burton, do help me. Have you seen Winnifred—Miss Forsyth—I mean? Can you find her for me? She was dancing with a Mr. Gwynne, a painter, an artist, or something of that sort. I have something particular to say to her. If you would bring her to me—I daresay you have seen her and know where she is to be found?’

‘I haven’t the faintest notion. Not seen her for hours.’

Beau Burton could draw at need upon a large stock of glib falsehood if it was re-

quired to shield his fair friends. Only that instant he had passed Winnifred and her new friend comfortably ensconced behind a tall palmetto bush in an adjoining conservatory.

‘But I’ll do my best, Lady Clementina; pray rely on me.’ He wished to monopolise the right of search. Others less well informed than himself might not go off, as he did, entirely in the wrong direction.

Presently His Royal Highness came up to Lady Clementina.

‘I was to have danced this with Miss Forsyth. Have you seen her?’

‘Oh no, sir. I have not. I can’t make it out.’ Her ladyship was quite distressed at such a breach of etiquette. Princes are not supposed to be kept waiting even for a quadrille.

‘I begged Major Burton to look for her and bring her here, quite half an hour ago. Here he comes, but without her.’

‘Can’t see her anywhere,’ the Beau said coolly and very slowly. ‘I fancy her dress must have gone wrong, and she’s being

stitched up somewhere. She was seen and heard of last in the direction of the cloak room.'

'She was to have danced the next with the Prince,' went on Lady Clementina, very unhappy in her mind.

'Really, sir?' the Beau stared at him fixedly and with a comical cock in his eye. The Prince with intuitive tact gathered that there was some particular reason why Miss Forsyth was absent.

'I've no doubt she will appear directly,' His Royal Highness said goodnaturedly, and then walked away with his equery.

'I know you wouldn't wish to spoil sport, sir. The fact is Miss Forsyth is otherwise—very much otherwise—engaged. If you will come this way I need not explain myself further.'

It was a clear case certainly. The *tête-à-tête* was something more than amicable. The words he whispered into her ear were evidently of the pleasantest nature. She was plucking out the flowers in her bouquet, and as they fell

one by one, he picked them up and gave them back to her. In this way his hand touched hers, so quite as a matter of course he took it, and quite naturally they looked into each other's eyes, and the next moment the pair who had been watching them with amusement, and had already sheered off, heard a sound—which was, in fact, nothing more or less than a kiss.

The Prince burst out laughing and hurried off as fast as he could.

By-and-by Major Burton met the guilty couple leisurely walking towards the more crowded part of the ball-room.

‘Miss Forsyth,’ he said promptly and with an amount of meaning she could not mistake, ‘Lady Clementina has been looking everywhere for you, and she has begged me to tell you so.’

Winnifred hung her head a little, but said with as much coolness as she could assume :

‘Well, I was not difficult to find, was I?’

‘Not the least,’ the Beau replied with

admirable effrontery. 'I saw you—all the time.'

If he had seen her how much had he seen?

'You ought to know Mr. Gwynne,' she said abruptly. 'This is Major Burton, a particular friend of mine.'

Dominic was in that state of inflated exaltation that there was no room in him for an atom of jealousy or doubt. He put out his hand, therefore, and gave the Beau a cordial greeting, which meant, as plainly as words could have said it, that Winnifred's particular friends were also his.

'If I might suggest I should recommend you to go back to Lady Clementina, if it was only to let her know that you are alive.'

'Shall I escort you?' Dominic asked eagerly. 'I ought to renew my acquaintance with her.'

Something in Burton's face warned Winnifred that perhaps Dominic had better keep out of her ladyship's way.

‘Come over to-morrow, that will be better.’

‘I shall see you again to-night? You will give me another dance?’

‘Unless Lady Clementina wants to be going home, as many as you like.’

Winnifred spoke as if she acknowledged his right to claim dances. He was master, his lightest wish was a law to her.

Then with a short farewell spoken only with eyes, but as mournful as though the parting were to endure for years, they separated.

‘Is Lady Clementina cross?’ she asked a little nervously.

‘Perfectly rabid. She suspects, I think——’

‘Well?’ Winnifred had nearly regained her composure. ‘Well, suspects what?’

‘You know what; don’t attempt to brazen it out with me, Miss Winnifred Forsyth, for it won’t wash.’

‘I don’t understand you, and I detest slang.’

‘Why, I caught you in the very act; spooning like—like—Adam and Eve. But I wouldn’t spoil sport. Bless you, my children, bless you.’

Winnifred was more than a little shy and uncomfortable. Yet of what had she to be ashamed? This was the man she had chosen; he was her own, her possession, the husband of her heart.

‘It’s the real thing this, and no mistake?’ went on the Beau. ‘You’ve got it hot? Riddled through and through?’

‘Oh please say no more about it.’ Winnifred was nearly crying.

‘What will your pa say? What will your ma say? There’ll be a fine row. You don’t suppose they’ll let you accept this man, do you?’

‘Why not? He is as good as the best. If you only knew him. He’ll live to be one of the greatest men of the time.’

‘I expect your father won’t care to wait till that comes off. What is he? What does he by daylight?’

‘He’s a painter.’

‘So I thought.’

‘Why?’

‘Not because his coat was smeared about with paint, or because his paper cap was sticking out of his pocket. But he seemed different to the rest of us——’

‘Better, more honest, more straightforward, unspoiled, simple, confiding?’

‘Very much so, I expect.’

‘What an aggravating man you are! You only say these things to vex me. I defy you to say a word against him.’

‘Only a simpleton would be beguiled by you, Miss Forsyth.’ Burton said with a grin.

‘Now you’re rude. I shall speak to you no more.’

‘Well, if your feelings are really touched—if you mean business—you know I’ve no more to say.’

‘I know I never was so happy in all my

life,' cried Winnifred with flushed cheeks and glittering eyes.

They were now close to the rest of the Burcham Paddox party, so this strange confidence came to an end.

CHAPTER IV.

‘At last’, Lady Clementina said. ‘Where have you been all these hours, Winnifred?’

‘Dancing’—a very curt reply, but spoken civilly. They were a little apart from other people; still the talk might be overheard, and Winnifred did not want to have a row in public.

‘We are very seriously annoyed, both your father and myself. I am, indeed, almost overcome, quite sick with disgust.’

‘You look it. What shall we do for you? Call in advice?’

‘I beg you will not be so flippant. That is not the way to palliate or excuse your misconduct.’

‘Misconduct!’ cried Winnifred hotly, and not without some inward trepidation. ‘What

right have you to make use of such language to me ?’

‘Question your own conscience; you must be well aware that not even the strongest expressions would be far-fetched.’

On what did Lady Clementina base this trenchant criticism? How much did she know? Had she seen anything herself, or had some gossiping busybody carried tales and made mischief? A spasm of misgiving seized her, and while it lasted she felt obliged to be circumspect and slow to take offence.

Besides, just then Winnifred really wished to remain on good terms with her stepmother. She wanted Lady Clementina’s countenance and support; she had again as good as accepted Dominic Gwynne, had made up her mind to marry him and no one else soon, or at least without that indefinite procrastination which she had insisted upon at Pallanza. There must be no opening for a second absurd quarrel, no repetition of the rupture occasioned at Simplan by a ridiculous misunderstanding and mistake. She meant to

marry Dominic whenever it might suit him to ask her.

But she was a prey to terrible uncertainty. How this resolution would be received by her own people? Of course her father would oppose it, vigorously and obstinately, at first. The mere mention of a suitor who worked for his daily bread would drive Colonel Forsyth nearly out of his mind; on the other hand, Lady Clementina knew Dominic well, and had professed always unbounded esteem for him. Winnifred hoped great things from her assistance if it could only be secured.

That she counted without her host was plain from her stepmother's next speech.

'I thought better of the man, I must say. He was always so unassuming and quiet in his demeanour, and I fancied he knew his place. It appears now that I was altogether deceived in him.'

'Of whom, pray, are you speaking?'

'This Mr. Glynn, or Flynn, or Wynne; the person we met at the Italian Lakes last year.'

‘So you don’t even remember his name ? or is that mere pretence ? And what more may you have to say against Mr. Gwynne ?’

Winnifred was not likely to listen tamely to any attempt to cry him down.

‘I complain, and I think with just cause, of the way he has made you a laughingstock, the talk of the whole ball-room.’

‘How, pray ?’

‘By his marked attentions. He is of course principally to blame. That you are only too ready to forget yourself I know ; but he ought not to have taken advantage of that—considering the obligations he was under to me, the extreme kindness with which I treated him, he ought to have shown better feeling.

‘However, I have your father’s express and explicit commands that you never speak to this Mr. Gwynne again.’

Winnifred looked Lady Clementina straight in the face, and began speaking very slowly.

‘If you are going to take up that ground, it is as well you should know the exact state

of the case. Mr. Gwynne and I understand each other, and have done so for months. When he comes forward, as he will in his own good time, I intend to become his wife.'

Lady Clementina turned quite white. She seemed utterly aghast at this sudden and preposterous announcement. She could hardly find words to express her disgust; every phrase that presented itself was inadequate to give due effect to her feelings.

'A more reckless and unprincipled proceeding I never heard of, never in my whole life,' she said at length, and still felt that there was more to be said.

'Such strong language is ridiculous. It won't turn me; you ought to know me by this time. My mind is fully made up.'

'And your father—do you fancy he will give his consent?'

'In the long run he will. He may at first demur a little, perhaps.'

'Demur? a little?' Lady Clementina thought of what Colonel Forsyth had said, and shivered. Was not this the very cata-

strophe he had warned her against? Oh, why had she been so blind! She began to wish she had never seen Venice; that the Italian Lakes were all dried up; that sketching from nature was a lost art like making Nankin China or telling the truth. Lady Clementina was in such abject terror that she was ready to go any lengths to prevent an unpleasant *dénouement*. Perhaps submission and entreaty would answer better with Winnifred than bluster and big talk.

She threw herself at once upon the girl's tender mercies.

'Oh, Winnifred, I implore you, please, please, do nothing rash. I quite shudder to think how your father will receive this news. Do not be hurried by mere caprice——'

Winnifred did not like the word and looked dogged.

'I dare say you feel strongly on the matter. It may be something more than a passing fancy. But the step is so serious, you might regret it all your life afterwards. You will try, Winnifred—to oblige me you

will try—to think this well over before you finally decide?’

‘I have decided already, once and for all.’

‘Well, at least you will keep your own counsel. Help me to prepare your father, slowly and gradually. We will ask Mr. Gwynne to the house when we get back to Brook Street. He shall dine and be made welcome, and you will have a better opportunity of becoming acquainted.’

‘Don’t you think I know all about him already? I know him by heart.’

‘Yes, yes, but it is wiser to wait. Now promise me—you will promise me, won’t you—not to broach the subject too soon? You won’t *brusquer* it?’

‘There’s no need to speak in any hurry. The next move must come from Dominic—I mean from Mr. Gwynne.’

‘And you will do nothing to raise new suspicions, nor to strengthen the old? Don’t dance with him any more to-night; don’t make yourself remarkable again——’

‘I have promised him another dance.’

‘Not to-night. We are going home directly. Your father is tired. I am bored ; all this has agitated me very much. Do stay with me now.’

‘Impossible. I must say good-night to him ;’ and Winnifred once more accepted Major Burton’s arm just as Colonel Forsyth came back to his wife.

‘Don’t be in a hurry, Ferdinand,’ Lady Clementina said deprecatingly. ‘She is ready to go directly after this dance.’

‘Have you spoken to her ?’ he asked very crossly.

‘Yes, I have.’

‘In plain English, I sincerely trust—no beating about the bush ? You have used straight downright honest Saxon ?’

‘I told her how much you were annoyed ; how wrong and open to misconstruction her behaviour was.’

‘How did she take it ?’

‘Wonderfully well. She is really only thoughtless, and light-headed. Her heart is sound, but her impulses carry her away and she lays herself open to criticism.’

‘That’s all very well. But I cannot allow an affair of this kind to happen a second time. To pick out a perfect stranger——’

‘Not quite that.’

‘Are you going to take her part? Perhaps you first encouraged him?’

Lady Clementina hastened to get off such dangerous ground.

‘Not at all, I only just knew him ; and from what I saw of him I feel sure he is quite harmless. He would not presume, I’m certain. Winnifred knows too what is due to herself.’

Lady Clementina’s fears were leading her further and further into a web of sophistry and deceit.

‘I’d like to give her a bit of my mind myself, very much indeed,’ said Colonel Forsyth, who was braver perhaps behind Winnifred’s back than he would have been to her face.

‘It will only put notions into her head ; she likes to take opposite views ; you would only drive her into being more and more perverse.

If you will be advised, you will say nothing, at present.'

Winnifred, when she returned, therefore, was spared any open reproof. But Colonel Forsyth looked very glum, and in the long drive back to Burcham hid himself away in the far-off corner of the carriage and alternately snorted and snored. Lady Clementina tried commonplaces with Winnifred, eager, as it seemed, to keep the girl in good humour, to which, her mind being busy with other thoughts, Winnifred made only monosyllabic or irrelevant replies.

There was a set supper laid out at Burcham Paddox for such of the weary guests as cared to ruin their digestions with soup, oysters, and *entrées* at four in the morning. Most of the company, undeterred by the fear of consequences, sat down to this and grew very chatty over it. A sort of temporary intimacy is established between people who have been staying any time together in the same house ; it may be followed next day by the cut direct, but for the time being they

are the fastest of friends. There is a certain freemasonry among them, they are members of a secret conclave having both the will and the power to tear in pieces all beyond the pale.

It was the first time Mr. Crammersh had been admitted to these elevated regions, and he was greatly elated thereat. He took a particular pride in proving that he had no loyalty to his town and its belongings. It was he who led off with ridicule and depreciatory criticism, very much to the satisfaction of the rest, who might otherwise have been tongue-tied by his presence.

‘Very mixed,’ said this traitor with superb disdain for his compatriots.

‘Some of the garbs were a little peculiar,’ said Lady Adeline.

‘I admired their way of dancing,’ said Burton.

‘And I their accent,’ added Yellowborough.

‘Shoddy of course,’ went on Colonel Forsyth.

‘It’s a sight I shall never forget,’ remarked

‘That was when he was so wild,’ the duchess said; ‘before he married; he has a seat in the House now.’

‘I sometimes contribute to the art journals,’ Lord Yellowborough observed. ‘Critiques. The public so often requires to be put right.’

‘How kind of you to volunteer for the task!’

‘No; but, really, their tendencies are so wrong, they don’t know what to admire. If I had an ambition, it would be to be the apostle of æstheticism. I would preach the doctrine high and low’

‘If you could be only sure of your audience, Lord Yellowborough,’ Winnifred said with rather a scornful laugh.

‘I have heard repeatedly your taste is exquisite.’ Lady Clementina hastened to apply a salve.

‘I should like your opinion on my collection,’ Crammersh said, eager to show off. ‘It might cure you of your predilection for the old masters.’

‘Why not make a party to go over to

Crinkleton—that is, if you will allow us, Mr. Crammersh?’ said the young Prince.

‘Oh, sir, it would be too much honour. If your Royal Highness would really condescend.’

The visit was decided upon then and there. Mr. Crammersh insisted that the whole party should lunch at his house. It was eight miles distant, the days were short, and this would give him more time to exhibit his treasures.

Everyone fell in gladly with the scheme. There was a certain relief in an outing after a late ball; it would give them all a fillip and keep them going till it was time to enjoy well-earned repose: the notion was excellent.

Winnifred only gave Lady Clementina to understand that in all probability she would not make one of the party.

‘It will be most discourteous to Mr. Crammersh.’

‘I shall be too tired to enjoy it.’

‘Why should you be more tired than any of us?’

‘ You haven’t danced all night.’

‘ And have you ?’ But then Lady Clementina hastened to say, lest the speech should give offence,

‘ Well, we’ll see how you are in the morning.’

Why this determination ? Lady Clementina was a good deal disturbed by Winnifred’s announcement. Could it be that the lovers had made some arrangement to meet, and that therefore Winnifred wished to remain at Burcham alone ?

She did not like even to hint at her suspicions ; she must still be politic and must still temporize. Colonel Forsyth must, at all hazards, be kept as long as possible in the dark.

This might have been effected if dealing with another man than Dominic Gwynne. But his simplicity and inexperience hastened a *dénouement*. Having learnt from Winnifred’s own lips that she had lost none of her liking for him, he was resolved to tamper with her happiness no longer, but put an end to all

adverse chance by promising to make her his wife at once.

This the same night he carried into effect by addressing Colonel Forsyth in a manly straightforward letter. Her ladyship was sipping her chocolate at her dressing-table when her husband came in with it in his hand.

‘Read this,’ he said briefly, looking as black as night.

It said :—

‘Dear Sir,—It is with diffidence and some misgiving that I venture to broach a subject I have very much at heart. I wish to make an offer of marriage to your daughter, Miss Winnifred Forsyth.

‘I am well aware that neither my income nor my present position exactly constitute me what is called a good match. I am a painter and I live entirely by my art. I have as yet put no money by, and I can therefore make no settlements. But against this I may perhaps be allowed to urge that I earn a fair yearly sum—in the year last past it amounted to 750*l.*—while my prospects are good and

my prices are increasing. This is doubtless but a vague and inadequate provision for a person of distinction like Miss Forsyth ; but unless I am strangely deceived, she is not mercenary and would be content to take her chance of poverty or deferred wealth with any man for whom she cared.

‘While in Italy I had happily many opportunities for becoming well acquainted with Miss Forsyth, and I must not conceal from you that I think she is thoroughly well aware of the state of my feelings towards her ; still, I have made no attempt to bind her by a promise, nor does she know that I intend to write this letter.

‘The many kindnesses I received at the hands of Lady Clementina Forsyth encourage me to hope that she will speak in my favour. I am well known to her although I have the misfortune to be an utter stranger to you.

‘I have endeavoured to be perfectly frank and straightforward in stating my case, and must now throw myself altogether upon your

goodnature. As suspense will be difficult to bear, I beg of you to let me have my answer with all convenient despatch.

‘I remain, &c.’

‘Well, Clementina,’ began the colonel almost before he had given her time to master the contents of the letter. ‘What apology, what excuse, have you to offer for this outrage?’

‘Really, Ferdinand, I can say nothing. It deprives me almost of all power of speech.’

‘But you expected it?’

‘Not in the least.’

‘Then you are little better than a fool. Obviously it was what would happen. When and where did you meet this audacious ruffian first?’

Lady Clementina in faltering accents explained.

‘You struck up an acquaintance in a railway carriage with a perfect stranger; you renewed it at an hotel; you travelled home together across the Alps! And this is the first I hear of it.’

‘It was a commonplace travelling adventure. But for this, I should have forgotten the man’s existence. He has deceived me so terribly ; I never thought he would presume so far.’

‘Winnifred of course encouraged his attentions?’

‘Not at all. She professed always to dislike him excessively. I told her more than once that she showed it too openly. She could not bear him, really, as I thought.’

‘There is some comfort in that,’ said Colonel Forsyth with a sigh of relief. ‘And her behaviour with him last night was only a piece of her usual flightiness. She shall give him his answer herself. But I sincerely trust this will be a warning to you in the future. You must really be more circumspect. Another affair of the kind might have a very different termination.’

‘I think, perhaps—I believe, in fact—that you are just a little premature—I mean that I should not advise—that I fancy it would not be safe——’

‘For heaven’s sake get on.’

‘I don’t think Winnifred ought to be allowed to have any communication with this person.’

‘Clementina, do pray explain yourself.’

‘I mean that she has half confessed to—she has as much as told me—when I spoke to her at the ball last night severely, she gave me to understand——’

‘When will you come to the point, Clementina?’

‘She declared that it was her intention to accept this Mr. Gwynne.’

I fear Colonel Forsyth suffered something very like an oath to escape from him.

‘Accept a low-born beggar of this sort! I’d sooner see her—see her—’ sweep a crossing he meant to say, but the simile seemed inappropriate. ‘Accept him! Never, not while I have a voice to gainsay it. Never, I solemnly declare.’

‘Don’t you think her capable of choosing to please herself?’ asked Lady Clementina, very mildly.

‘She may try, but she does not know, yet, how firm I can be.’

‘Anything like direct opposition would only make her the more obstinate, I feel sure of that.’

‘What would you suggest then?’ Colonel Forsyth asked surlily.

‘They must at all hazards be kept apart. Now I strongly suspect he intends to come over here to day.’

‘Why?’

‘Winnifred told me last night she would not join the party to Crinkleton. No doubt because she expects this man to call.’

‘She must and shall go—by force, if necessary.’

‘It would make a scandal. That would be ridiculous.’

‘It’s all very well to find fault with what I suggest; but have you anything better to propose?’

‘If we could only prevent this Mr. Gwynne from coming over. Why not write and tell him we do not approve of the match, and desire him to stay away?’

‘Would that stop him? I doubt it.’

‘It depends upon how our letter is worded. We might—’ Lady Clementina hesitated a little. The proposal on the tip of her tongue was a base one, and however readily we may decide in private to do a mean action, it goes against the grain to make open confession of it even to an accomplice.

‘We might answer for Winnifred,’ faltered Lady Clementina.

‘How? She means to accept, you say. I don’t see how that can help us.’

The man was slow to comprehend. Eve probably had to explain herself to Adam.

‘We have no knowledge of that; she is never of the same mind long. It may be all different with her to-day. Besides, we know that the match is most unsuitable, that it could never take place. I think we might write, jointly, a formal letter to the effect that it is all a mistake, that Winnifred likes him well enough—but as a friend, no more. We’ll say that she had no intention of encouraging other hopes, and that she is sorry she has

been misconstrued. I hope that will put an end to the whole affair.'

'Really, Clementina, you are growing quite clever in your old age. There is a stroke of genius almost in this.'

Then they sat down to compose the letter which should convey this pleasing intelligence to Dominic Gwynne. I fear neither realised that they were both guilty of black falsehood—no less. People who find themselves in a fix are not particular about taking the only available path, as it seems to them, although it be a trifle miry and wet. Perhaps Colonel Forsyth winced a little when the words were written down. A lie slips glibly off the tongue and may be forgotten almost as soon as it is said, but to write it—to form the letters one by one, the up strokes and down strokes, to cross the t's and dot the i's—is to do a dirty deed in cold blood and to be vividly reminded of it.

This precious composition delayed Lady Clementina and the colonel considerably. Meanwhile the rest of the party had assembled and had begun breakfast.

The day promised well, and Crammersh was full of the expedition.

‘I have sent over express to Crinkleton—there is no time for triumphal arches, but they will do what they can—I have told them to prepare a *déjeuner* in the picture gallery. It will be a pretty sight, I should like some record of it, of course. I shall fix a silver plate with an inscription commemorating your Royal Highness’s visit. But I should like something pictorial.’

‘Why not have the whole party photographed at lunch?’ suggested Winnifred.

‘I’ll do better,’ cried Mr. Crammersh; ‘I’ll have a picture painted of it, a large historical painting, which shall be exhibited and then retained as an heirloom. Capital! and now I remember—that young Gwynne was coming over to-day; I’ll secure him for the job.’

Winnifred at the moment was busy with her muffin, but she heard plainly enough, and the statement considerably changed her plans.

When Lady Clementina came down they were arranging how the party was to be

divided for the drive over. The Prince was a good whip, and Lord FitzHugh had a coach ; H.R.H. therefore would take charge of as many as it would hold, and with the gallantry of a very young man, he promptly offered the box seat to Winnifred.

‘ Thank you, sir ; you are very good.’

‘ Then you will go ?’ Lady Clementina said with a face of joy.

‘ Certainly.’

‘ Was there any doubt about it ?’ asked Lord FitzHugh.

‘ I was so dreadfully tired last night ; I was afraid I should have been too much done up.’

‘ I wish I’d been dreadfully tired, if I was as certain of looking fresh next day,’ said the duchess.

‘ I should have been greatly hurt if you had not been one of the party,’ observed Mr. Crammersh pompously.

‘ And I’m very glad you’ve changed your mind,’ said Lady Clementina ; ‘ although I forbear to ask why.’

No one at the table knew but Major

Burton, and Winnifred had long since secured his silence by an appealing look he could not mistake.

Soon after noon the *cortège* started. One of the Ladies Goldhawk and Winnifred were on the Prince's coach : Colonel Forsyth, also Beau Burton and one or two other men ; Lady Clementina was in the same carriage with the duchess and Mr. Crammersh.

'It will indeed be a proud moment,' he said—'the proudest in my life. And if the picture but does justice to the scene, I shall count it amongst my greatest treasures.'

'The picture ?' Lady Clementina asked blandly.

'We are to sit for our portraits, haven't you heard ? Mr. Crammersh has commissioned an artist to paint a grand memorial picture.'

The duchess rather liked the notion.

'Who is to be the painter ?' went on Lady Clementina quite innocently.

'That young Gwynne,' replied Crammersh off-hand.

‘From memory, or description, or what?’
almost gasped her ladyship.

‘Oh no ; he will be there—not quite one
of the party, of course—still he shall be well
received, and as he deserves.’

‘This is quite a sudden fancy?’

‘Not exactly ; we talked it over at breakfast. Miss Forsyth, in fact, first started the
notion, and I jumped at it.’

Now, when it was too late to make fresh
dispositions, Lady Clementina saw how it was
Winnifred had no longer any objection to join
in the expedition to Crinkleton.

CHAPTER V.

MR. CRAMMERSH some years back, when more than usually oppressed by his own opulence, declared suddenly that the house he had so long occupied in a Smokingham suburb was ridiculously inadequate for a man of his position and means. He must have a better place than Pine Tree Lodge: he would have the best that money could procure. He would pay any price to get exactly what he wanted. But nothing just then in the market came up to his ideas. One or two old places in the neighbourhood were to be had cheap, but he did not care about old places, or cheap ones either. There was Burcham Paddox—that might do, but half of it would have to be pulled down; nor was Lord FitzHugh disposed to part with it. The same reply came from other country potentates to whom Mr.

Crammersh's agents had made overtures. So there was no alternative but to build.

The architect who got the job was an ambitious man of some fancy and of florid taste. He revelled in the delight not often conceded to people of his profession of giving free vent to his powers. He was, besides, practically unlimited as to cost. Crinkleton was his *chef-d'œuvre*, therefore a bantling of which he was pardonably proud. Externally it was all turrets, pinnacles, and plate-glass ; internally, what the auctioneers call 'a palatial residence replete with every convenience.'

It stood in a somewhat exiguous park, but the most had been made of every inch of space. The drive, cunningly engineered, wound round and round by ornamental waters, past Swiss chalets, between artificial hillocks crowned with acacias, through thickets of rhododendron and arbutus. Mr. Crammersh's visitors might have been pilgrims compelled to make many *détours* before they might approach the central shrine. But as if to encourage them, the house towering up above

them like a tall Alp was everywhere visible. Now the front, now the rear, now this side, now that ; so that long before you reached it you knew the whole place by heart.

Its most striking characteristic outside was its newness, its spick and span staring newness. It was like a shilling fresh from the Mint, white and glittering all over. Built of Portland stone and white marble, all freshly cut, pure and undimmed by weather, one expected to see in parts the scaffolding and the masons still at work. Infinite pains had been taken with the garden and grounds, yet the walks looked as though they had been made the day before. The ivy was still in its first youth, the shrubs had the appearance of lodgers expecting any moment to move again.

It was the new house unmistakably of a new man.

Inside it was just the same. The fittings, furniture, and decorations, although gorgeous and magnificent, were one and all glaringly brand new. The marble mosaic pavements

shone like silver; the parquetry floor was varnished like an old master for sale in Wardour Street; spotless and sheeny were the satin and silken hangings, but painfully suggestive of the upholsterer's shop. The interior was all stucco, gilding, enamel, ivory, inlaid woods, and gaudy paint.

First a portico of handsome red granite polished; next an outer vestibule with glimpses of morning-rooms cream coloured on the one hand, on the other pale sage green; then a spacious inner hall, a wide central space around which were grouped the principal salons and chambers. By a conservatory rich with choice exotics, through a library filled by contract with books and busts and portraits, into drawing-rooms lemon-yellow, pale pink, and turquoise-blue, past a banquetting hall in Utrecht velvet and new oak, on to the ball-room of white and silver, with frescoed ceiling and walls painted in panels containing each a portrait after Watteau or Greuze, the party passed in procession, Mr. Crammersh leading the way. On one side of

him was a royal prince, on the other a duchess, and both hung upon his accents as with the pride of a proprietor he expatiated upon his possessions, and with all the eagerness and *empressement* of an hotel-keeper did the honours of his house.

‘These carpets, now, they came from Corbières, of Cannon Street. Powell did most of the glass, Powell of Whitefriars, and Salviati; but I don’t hold with that foreign glass; and the furniture from the best men in London, Gillow and Holland, and Jackson and Graham. Here, now, this suite in ivory, you see, sir—ivory table, sofa, chairs, whatnot complete—came from Wertheimer, and a pretty figure they cost. What would your Grace say to eleven thousand pounds? But that’s the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. It was my hobby then. I could afford it I thought. Who has a better right to spend his money than the man who makes it? Spend it and make more, that’s my rule. But I get my money’s worth, you know. There now, that’s a pretty thing.

Picked up in Dresden and sold at Christie's last year. Went for a fabulous sum. But it'll fetch it again and more. And this cabinet, Duchess, it's bool. I've any quantity of bool—I love bool.'

A gang of weary - footed sight-seers lagged behind—Winnifred, Beau Burton, Lord Yellowborough, and to them Mr. Crammer's talk filtered back in bits.

'Bool? what does he mean?' Winnifred asked. 'Has he a cold, and is he talking of the moon?'

'It's Buhl and Bernau, the boot-makers of the Burlington Arcade,' suggested the Beau.

I heard him mention a lot of other shops just now.'

'A bool in a china shop,' said Lord Yellowborough. 'Very appropriate, too.'

At which Winnifred laughed heartily, greatly to the peer's satisfaction.

She was radiant, and in the best of good humours. Was not Dominic, her lover, her chosen swain, somewhere close at hand? She was full of gladness at the thought, she

was certain to meet him, sooner or later, that day.

‘How wonderfully well Winnifred is looking,’ her father whispered to Lady Clementina, who joined him just then. ‘But what’s the matter with you?’

‘Oh, something terrible is going to happen, Ferdinand. I’ve been vainly trying to catch your eye. I want to speak to you privately at once. It is most urgent. Let us fall back a moment. Do come.’

‘You palsy me quite. I am shaking all over. In Heaven’s name, go on.’

‘I have only just heard—at least it was during the drive—Mr. Crammersh, that is to say told me——’

‘I shall ask him to tell me. You are evidently unfit or unable to do so.’

‘No, no; please wait; give me time. It’s Winnifred—at least I mean it’s that man, that painter man, that Gwynne man——’

The colonel looked as though he would like to shake his wife.

‘I wish he were at the bottom of the sea!’

At any rate, he's some way off, we probably shan't see him again. Why do you let the thought of him worry you ?'

'Shan't see him ? Why, I tell you, he is *here*, here now, or will be at any moment. Asked expressly to meet us.'

Colonel Forsyth started.

'God bless my soul !' he said, and rapidly repeated the phrase once or twice. 'Here, coming here, to meet us ? What does this man Crammersh mean by it ? It's most indelicate, in shocking bad taste.'

'Of course. It shows a total ignorance of etiquette. No one can be invited when royalty is the guest.'

'He ought to be told of it.'

'It's too late, Ferdinand. That is why I am so agitated.'

'We must look the thing in the face. What are you afraid of ? He will have got our letter.'

'Perhaps ; but either way it will be most disastrous. He is sure to try and seize an opportunity of speaking to Winnifred. He

will want a personal explanation. If he has had our letter, he will ask her whether she really endorses our views; if not, he will tell her of his proposal, and she will accept without our being able to stir a finger. Don't you see?'

'Anything more aggravating I never knew. What can have induced Crammersh to invite him?'

Lady Clémentina described the project of the memorial picture.

'Was there ever such tomfoolery? What a coxcombical purse-proud old jackass it is! It's bad enough to be trapezing up and down this cocktail gingerbread music-hall of a palace, but to be shoved into a picture for his glorification is more than man can bear. I won't submit to it. I won't stay here. We must all leave at once.'

'You know, Ferdinand, that's out of the question. It would be too rude. Besides, Winnifred would never consent to go with us.'

'Does she expect to meet this scoundrel?'

‘Most undoubtedly. That was the reason why she changed her mind and consented to come.’

‘Something must be done—and promptly,’ Colonel Forsyth said, with more resolution than he really felt. ‘Why can’t you have apoplexy, or hysterics, or some sudden seizure?’

‘That would not help us. I should be taken off to a bedroom, and Winnifred left to her own devices. No; the only chance is to keep her under our eye. Surely we can manage to keep them apart. That’s what we have to do.’

‘I declare I never was so upset in all my life. I shall have an illness myself, a serious illness. And that this should fall out so—this morning of all others!’

‘Why worse now than at any other time?’

‘Yellowborough has hinted to me very plainly that he wished to pay his addresses to her; hoped we should approve. I said of course we approved.’

‘But remember, Ferdinand. His character is not quite——’

‘Stuff and nonsense! What have we got to do with his character? Besides, who knows the rights of that business—whether he was really to blame or not? And what does it matter? Let bygones be bygones, and leave Winnifred to manage him as she would any other man between this and Madagascar.’

‘I daresay he would *ranger* himself in time. Still he is not quite the man to make a girl happy. Conceited, self-satisfied, not scrupulously moral.’

‘As if anyone was, in these days. And look at his position, at the status he would give Winnifred, of the settlements he could make. It would be a splendid match for her.’

‘If she would only see it.’

‘That’s the aggravating part of it. That’s why it’s so annoying that this other brute should stand in the way. I never felt so vexed; and I don’t see my way out of it—I don’t, indeed.’

‘We can only hope for the best, and do

our best to prevent anything like a *tête-à-tête* between Winnifred and this Mr. Gwynne.'

'What conspiracy are you two hatching together?'

It was Winnifred's voice, at which both started and looked rather guilty. She was coming out of the picture gallery, and still in the highest spirits. Lord Yellowborough was with her.

'Don't you want to see the collection?' she went on. 'It's like a bric-a-brac shop. Magnificent red marbles, Gobelin tapestry (imitation), ceiling by Michael Angelo (a copy), old blue (made by Minton last year).'

'And the pictures?' asked Lady Clementina.

'I don't think there are any. I saw none—not what I call pictures.'

'That's a comfort!' said Colonel Forsyth, taking the remark literally. 'I hate pictures.'

'I think Miss Forsyth means that those in Mr. Crammersh's collection are lacking in the high qualities of true works of art.' Lord Yellowborough fixed his eye-glass in his eye,

and addressed himself entirely to Colonel Forsyth. 'These are all of the British, the modern British school, and they are conspicuous examples of its chief defects. They display great crudity of colour, poverty of invention, little technical skill. They are not subjective; they arouse no emotions or sentiment but of the most commonplace kind.'

'Ah!' said the colonel blandly, wishing that the occasion was such that he could turn the conversation by laying the odds or asking for a light.

'Now, to my ideas—erroneous it may be, but evolved by patient investigation—the true painter should aim at thorough sympathetic subjectivity, at tuneful harmony of accord, at poetical interpretation of facts chastened by the deepest imaginative idealisation.'

'Of course,' chimed in Lady Clementina, 'I quite understand;' which was quite untrue; neither she nor anyone else knew what Lord Yellowborough meant—himself least of all.

‘Come!’ cried Winnifred, by way of commentary. ‘We’re going to see the kitchen.’

Mr. Crammersh had reason to be proud of his arrangements for household service. The duchess told him so in language of high approval, and she was an authority on such matters. The necessities of an income narrow for their position in life, had long made her a notable housewife; in other words, a domestic tyrant and a screw. Her servants hated her, and not without cause. Constant supervision was her platform; the strictest household discipline her watchword. Frequently when the ducal carriage returned to the ducal mansion in town, coachman in cocked hat and powdered wig on the elaborate hammercloth, well-calved and well-bouquetted footmen on the dashboard behind, when the steps had been let down with a bang, and the portals flew wide at the touch of the over-grown hall porter, her Grace, for choice, would descend the area steps and enter her house from below stairs. It gave her an opportunity, she said, of seeing what

was really going on. Now she caught Thyrza, the second housemaid, flirting with the under-butler; now the cook, neglecting her *entrées* to play the concertina, or write articles for the 'Queen' on the æsthetics of frying fish. She made midnight perambulations all over the house, taking stock of the loaves left in the bread crock, counting the cold potatoes, and seeing that no tricks were played with the kitchen grease. Very rigid was the economy practised in the servants' hall; the dinners were of the plainest—plain roast and boiled, but the plainness was in the meat being underdone so that no one could eat much of it. Elsewhere in the house the same thriftiness prevailed. In the schoolroom her daughters were half starved, and the spareness of their frames in after life was in a measure due to the spareness of their childish diet. Equally Spartan was the treatment of the mild little duke, who never dared open his lips when his wife was by, who allowed her to keep the cellar-book and supervise his tailor's bills.

Now, in the basement at Crinkleton the duchess was in her glory. She inspected, criticised, praised in turn. The kitchen, like a studio—lofty, well-lighted, spacious—delighted her. She examined all its appliances, its hot closets, steamers, gas stoves, elaborate ranges, and discussed the *pros* and *cons.* of each. Having visited the sculleries, bakeries, distilleries, dairy, servants' hall, the linen closets, plate room, pantry, and butler's sanctum, the complex apparatus for ventilating and warming the whole house, with its furnaces and miles of pipes, she expressed the highest satisfaction at all she had seen.

'Perfect—complete at every point; but difficult to keep up, I feel sure. Now, I do trust you have a good housekeeper?'

It was well known that Mr. Crammersh was a widower. His wife—patient helpmeet through his early struggling years—had never fully enjoyed his prosperity. After a long and painful illness, the poor, invalid, bedridden soul had passed away a few years back; and Mr. Crammersh had already en-

tertained the notion that it was time for him to marry again.

Perhaps the duchess understood this ; she repeated—

‘A thoroughly good housekeeper?’

‘I have a very decent person. She was niece to an archbishop, or something of that sort ; and I pay her a high salary.’

‘Ah ! but no money will buy the constant supervision such an establishment as this requires. You will find that out some day.’

The duchess intended to imply that no housekeeper would suit him so well as a wife. She might have proceeded even to indicate that he might find one exactly suitable in one or other of the Ladies Goldhawk, who had been educated on sound principles, and were well grounded in the grammar of household management, when a footman came in search of Mr. Crammersh with a gentleman’s card on a salver.

‘To see me ? Ah ! to be sure. Quite right—directly. Tell him to take a chair in the library. There is little more to show

here, sir, and we had, perhaps, better ascend. You may wish to rest, duchess, and all the ladies likewise. Meanwhile, I will discuss what is to follow in our programme with this young Gwynne who has just arrived.'

'Winnifred! quick!' cried Lady Clementina. 'Have you brought your smelling salts? I feel so faint.'

Winnifred had brought nothing of the kind, and said so rather brusquely. She wanted no smelling salts; nor, for the matter of that, did Lady Clementina. The sudden enquiry had no other object but to distract Winnifred's attention when her lover's name was mentioned, and in this it quite succeeded. She was still unconscious when they regained the reception rooms that Dominic was actually in the house.

As for him, although unnerved and shaken by the disappointment which had so unexpectedly overtaken him—for the deceitful missive had reached him in due course—he had made an effort to keep his promise to Mr. Crammersh. He meant to spend half-

an-hour at Crinkleton, taking it *en route* to town. He told his host this.

‘You must really stay longer. I have something I particularly wish you to do. You must stay lunch. I have a large party of friends here.’

‘Indeed ? I am scarcely in the key to meet strangers. I have had some very bad news.’

‘Ah ! well ; that’s sad. Still I trust you will be persuaded. It does not do to brood, you know ; brooding is bad, brooding is bad. And my friends are the very highest people—of the best quality ; such a chance as you seldom come across. I can present you to the Prince—he is here, and the Duchess of Hammersmith, and the Duke and his daughters, and Colonel Forsyth and Lady Clementina——’

‘Are they among your guests ?’ Dominic abruptly asked, flushing red.

‘Most assuredly they are, and the young lady—Miss Forsyth—a very charming girl,

who is, I think, aware of your high claims as a painter.'

'My name is not likely to interest her,' Dominic said, coldly.

While he was still speaking Winnifred and Lord Yellowborough came towards them. His lordship was gesticulating, using his hands as if in entreaty, his eye-glass was fixed upon her, and his whole air was that of a man deeply interested in his subject.

Winnifred seemed to be listening with complacency, nay, with pleasure.

Suddenly she raised her eyes and saw Dominic in front of her.

Why this trembling of the hands, this tightening of the heart-strings, followed by the hard set look of disappointment and pain upon her troubled face?

Was this how lovers meet the morning after the renewal of their vows? A distant bow, curling lip, stern eyes and frowning brows. The greeting of an avowed enemy would have been warmer than this. She thought she read upon his face dislike, scorn,

contempt. What could it mean? Was the man false or foolish, or both?

All this, a prey to strong emotion, Winnifred asked herself, in the next few seconds, resolving at the same time that nothing short of the fullest explanation should win Dominic forgiveness for his fault.

But no explanation was to be offered just then.

Almost as he bowed Dominic turned upon his heel and muttering some half-intelligible excuses to Mr. Crammersh, walked straight out of the house.

Had he seen her? Ridiculous—why, he had bowed. What was she to do? What could she do? Once already she had extended the olive branch, to do so yet again would savour of cowardly, contemptible want of spirit.

‘Let him go,’ she said to herself, but with a lump in her throat and bitterness in her heart—a bitterness which she vented upon Lord Yellowborough.

‘Say but the word, and we will fly the

world—fly to some island-home beyond the seas, to some paradise bright as a gem upon the pellucid waters, where the languorous air of perpetual summer noon woos the budding flower and the ripening fruit, where the music of the brooklet and the songs of gay-plumaged birds soothe the senses with charmed sounds, and there amidst Elysian fields, simple children of nature unconventional and unrestrained, we will emulate our first parents, and renewing from hour to hour the protestations of an undying attachment expand one short lifetime into an eternity of bliss.’

Lord Yellowborough delivered this impassioned harangue in the sing-song voice and with the see-saw manner he had been taught to believe irresistible in debate.

‘Psha! Don’t talk such ridiculous rubbish,’ Winnifred abruptly said, speaking quite angrily.

‘Can it be possible that my words fail to touch a responsive chord in your heart? Can you doubt that the devotion I proffer you is the deepest, the most sincere, the worship as

intense as that of the fanatic at the shrine of his patron saint, the love with which I am consumed, as ardent, as passionate, as fierce and fiery——’

‘We must send for Captain Shaw to put you out, Lord Yellowborough. I wonder whether Mr. Crammersh is insured.’

‘Oh ! but cease to trifle ; jest not with a subject so solemn, so soul-absorbing as love. Its power is colossal, far reaching, ever green ; it is the one grain of sweet in a whole universe of sorrow ; to reject it, resist it, deny its soul-compelling influence, is to surrender the very pith and essence, the innermost kernel and core of enjoyment, the single real and unalloyed happiness that mortal man can know.’

‘Lord Yellowborough, would you oblige me by translating this rhapsody into plain English ?’

Winnifred’s icy coldness condensed Lord Yellowborough as if he had been steam.

‘Miss Forsyth, I wish to offer you my hand and heart.’

‘There is something tangible in that. The statement is clear and explicit, and it deserves a straightforward answer. I am sensible of the honour you would do me, but I must distinctly decline.’

‘Miss Forsyth!’ Surprise and astonishment gave the words the inflection of a shriek. Then he went on in a high falsetto speaking very rapidly.

‘But I have your father’s approval and consent. He said he thoroughly approved, that Lady Clementina approved, that you yourself approved——’

‘My father has no authority to speak for me, and I shall tell him so. But let there be an end of this. I am in no mood to continue such a conversation. You must take my answer as final.’

‘You give me no hope that in the future—by-and-by, some day—I may win a different reply?’

‘Never! Do not count upon it. It is quite impossible.’

‘Your affections are already engaged?’

‘Have you any right to ask that question?’

Half an hour earlier Winnifred would not have hesitated to answer it; but now she scarcely knew what to say.

‘Of course not; still it would be a consolation to think I had failed because I was late in the field, not because I was unable to please.’

‘You are late in the field. I will admit that much as a salve to your vanity. Come, Lord Yellowborough, don’t look so downcast. You’ll soon get over this. There are lots of girls ready to try the southern paradises, and the birds and the falling water and all that.’

‘I shall marry a Sandwich Islander.’

‘Do, and I’ll come to the wedding,’ she said, with a pale smile.

There was very little joy or mirth left in her now. At lunch she sat glum and silent, a wet blanket upon the whole party. Others did not fail to notice it. Beau Burton, her neighbour, told her she seemed ‘off her chump,’ and considerately pressed her to try the champagne. Lady Clementina, with every

appearance of fussy concern, feared she was over-fatigued. Colonel Forsyth looked vexed and anxious, as though he thought she was sickening for some distemper. To these three persons the true solution of Winnifred's dejection was supplied by the short colloquy which now followed between the duchess and Mr. Crammersh.

‘And the great picture?’ her Grace asked.
‘When will it be begun?’

‘Not to-day, I grieve to say.’ Mr. Crammersh was in high dudgeon. ‘There is no one to paint it.’

‘I thought you had engaged an artist?’
The duchess spoke of it as though the painter had been a housemaid or a cook.

‘Yes; I proposed to give the commission to young Gwynne, but he has refused it.’

‘How extraordinary! You are sure?’

‘Oh, yes, he came, but in the most unaccountable way refused to remain. His behaviour was altogether bearish and uncouth.’

‘He was aware that we were all here waiting?’

‘Perfectly. That’s what seemed to disturb him. He took himself off almost immediately afterwards.’

‘Without apology or explanation?’

‘Nothing that I could comprehend. But then, duchess, what matter? He has gone; there’s an end of it.’

Gone, yes, gone straight back to London, to unbosom himself to his old friend Greatorex, and gain, if he could, consolation and advice.

Guy Greatorex had a comfortable bachelor home, in the St. John’s Wood district; one or two rooms attached to a vast studio, big enough to hold all the rest of the house inside it. A studio crammed and crowded with the harvests of many years’ travel in many lands. It was like a bric-a-brac dealer’s private warehouse and store; every inch of space almost was pressed into the service, the floor was encumbered, the walls of course, even the ceiling. Among the nondescript furniture a prominent feature was a wide low divan, clearly of Eastern origin, covered

with a gay striped stuff, and provided with luxurious cushions and pillows. Near the divan were low circular tables of carved wood ebonised ; on one a chiboque, on another a coffee-service, on a third the books that were just then in favour. From the ceiling hung numberless odds and ends, an albatross flying, Japanese and Chinese lanterns, fine lamps from Damascus, and one from Morocco, gem encrusted ; on the walls pictures finished and unfinished, copies, originals, etchings, prints, photographs ; while all round the room ran a high shelf loaded with china, pots and pottery, faience, Rhodian plates, Sèvres, majolica, Capo di monte, Wedgwood, bronzes also, jars, idols in ivory, idols in stone. The room was in a muddle, of course, and desperately untidy. Everything was in a jumble. Handsome dresses from Japan, the full fur suit of an Esquimaux, the burnoos of a Bedouin Arab, the vestments of a Spanish archbishop: easels, and every contrivance, new and old, for prosecuting the painter's trade, studio ladder, sunlight studio lamp, with a

range of lights and yards of india-rubber tubing, conventional lay figures, plaster casts: a stuffed peacock with tail outspread, marquetry cabinets, Chippendale chairs, some old oak carvings, *repoussée* brass trays, shields, armour, matchlocks, rapiers, tapestry, old silver—these were lying here, there, everywhere, all over the place.

Numbers of unfinished pictures stood upon easels, or were hung on the walls, many of them large and of the most ambitious scope, for old Guy—disposed first of all to please himself in the matter of art—had a leaning towards the highest flights, and preferred of all others Scriptural subjects. Here was ‘Solomon in all his glory,’ a pictorial allegory, a landscape filled with lilies, through which streamed a procession of magnificently dressed Jewish gentlemen; there the battle of Tiglath Pilesher, and the descent of Sennacherib with his hosts of Assyrians. These works were in various stages, but all were far from completion. Greatorex was bad at ‘finishing’; he preferred the early processes,

and generally threw aside old in the prosecution of newer and fresher ideas. Now and again, when his inventive faculties were fertile and his hands eager, he seemed seized with a fury for work, a strange light came into his eyes, and he stuck to his studio hour after hour, turning night into day, refusing food even, and resisting fatigue, sooner than tear himself from his canvas and his last conception. Then followed a period of collapse, when you might have bought all his stock in trade—easel, brushes, palette, properties, all—for a song.

Something of this was apparent in him when Dominic found him over a curry and a bottle of Pommery, very dry.

Guy growled out :

‘ So you’ve condescended to return ? I thought you’d given up art, taken to cotton spinning. Quite preposterous ; to waste a whole week, now too within a month of “ sending in.” You’ll never get the picture finished, properly finished, as all pictures should be.’

Being averse from 'finishing' himself, Guy set it up as a cardinal virtue in the painter.

'You're right. It will never be finished, now.'

Dominic spoke in the gloomiest and most despondent tone.

'Young ass. What's happened to you? Have you lost all your pluck?'

'I've had a tremendous facer. Another; and I can't hold up against it. I'm off.'

'Off? Your head, I suppose?'

'Not far off that; but off, I mean, to Abyssinia.'

'There are lunatic asylums much nearer. I'll see you are properly admitted.'

'It is no joke, Guy; really no joke. I cannot stay in this country, not an hour longer than is unavoidable. The "News" asked me to go for them with the Abyssinian expedition, and I'm going.'

'You are in earnest? Seriously. Yes? Let me have the whole story then—who is she?'

‘The same she. There can be no other she in the world for me.’

‘Miss Forsyth? Infatuated young idiot! Where did you come across her?’

‘She was at Smokingham, at least at Burcham Paddox——’

‘I know—Lord FitzHugh’s place.’

‘Lord FitzHugh is her stepmother’s brother. There was a royal visit, you know, and all that. I met her at the ball; she herself reopened communications, called me to her. Of course we made friends again. I danced all night with her nearly, and, feeling sure I had made all square, wrote before I went to bed, and proposed.’

‘Direct?’

‘No; I thought myself in duty bound to refer first to her parents, to ask their permission.’

‘Well, perhaps so; the notion does you credit. Many men would have been less punctilious. And how did they meet your advances?’

‘Read this.’

It was the letter referred to in the last chapter.

‘Colonel and Lady Clementina Forsyth,’ it said, ‘present their compliments to Mr. Dominic Gwynne, and thank him for his obliging offer for the hand of their daughter, Miss Winnifred Forsyth.’

‘This proposal has taken them completely by surprise, and they lose no time in assuring Mr. Gwynne that they cannot for one moment entertain it, as they have other and very different views for Miss Forsyth. They are glad to find that she entirely agrees with them, and that Mr. Gwynne has quite misunderstood her. She may have appeared to take a pleasure in Mr. Gwynne’s society, and she confesses that she did ; but she had no notion that warmer feelings were inspired. She likes him well enough, as a friend, no more ; and she is too well aware what is due to herself to agree to a marriage with Mr. Gwynne.’

‘Colonel Forsyth has only just been informed of the obligations under which Mr.

Gwynne laid Lady Clementina and Miss Forsyth by giving them lessons in Italy, last autumn, in his charming art. Colonel Forsyth fully realises the value of Mr. Gwynne's instruction, and will gladly forward him a cheque, if he will be so good as to state the price he puts upon his services.'

'A more disgraceful epistle I never had the misfortune to read. Insolent, heartless, contemptible!' cried Greatorex. 'But it is as I said. I told you she was not to be trusted.'

'You really believe they express her views?'

'Most undoubtedly.'

'Yet we parted only the night before the very best of friends.'

'That may be: she was ready to flirt and coquette with you to your and her heart's content; but to marry a poor man, or at best one with his way yet to make—no, no, she must have diamonds, and horses, and carriages, galore, and you are sent to the right-about at once.'

‘I could not have believed it of her,’ said Dominic, with another heavy sigh. ‘And yet I don’t know what to think. I’m utterly wretched, old friend. I can’t stay here, not in this country. I must be off. I want movement, excitement, change of scene.’

‘And your work? your advancement along the great road to fame? Is your ambition dead already?’

‘I never had much, old Guy.’

‘Have you no spirit? Why not stay here, and carve out a name for yourself, to show them their mistake—even from a worldly point of view?’

‘By-and-by, perhaps, not now. I cannot sit still; it would be impossible. I cannot breathe the same air with her. But later, never fear. I shall return, probably, a stronger, certainly a more sane and sensible, man.’

‘These women, these women! The mischief they do, and will do to the end of time! Now one more good man gone wrong; ruined by their wickedness and wiles!’

‘Come, come ; not ruined, Guy, as you will see. Some day all this will be like a bad dream thankfully forgotten, or but very vaguely remembered. And now, old man, good-bye.’

‘God bless you, Dominic ; and—well, I won’t swear—but these women, these women ! why do they exist ?’

CHAPTER VI.

WITHIN a week or two a short paragraph went the round of the morning journals. It was to the effect that the 'Picturesque News' had secured the services of that promising young artist, Mr. Dominic Gwynne, as their correspondent for the Abyssinian war.

Winnifred saw the announcement.

There could be no mistake, then. He was gone; without a word. Without rhyme or reason he had abruptly disappeared. Winnifred was at first utterly perplexed and surprised. She tried to reason the problem out calmly, to discover the causes which could have led Mr. Gwynne to behave so strangely; but she could arrive at no satisfactory solution from whatever point she approached the subject. Had he been fairly used? Was it possible that he had made formal overtures

to her parents and that they had indignantly rejected him? They might have been disposed to do so, but surely they would have consulted her first? Besides, even if their answer had been unfavourable, he ought not to have been thus easily turned aside. If so, he was but a poor creature; his love had but a slight and unsubstantial basis. A man who took a 'no' at second hand, without insisting upon a reply from the person primarily concerned, could hardly claim to be in earnest or deserve a better fate.

Then a new doubt oppressed her. Perhaps he had been false intentionally, and of *malice prépense*. Had wished to pay her off in her own coin, to win her, then flout her, and leave her in despair. It was to this notion that she leant more and more as the time slipped by. But the bare thought was humiliating, annoying to exasperation. Her pride rose up in arms directly. That she, Winnifred Forsyth, who had had crowds of men, the very best men, at her feet, should be slighted by one, and he the only one she had

ever appeared to favour—indignation is a feeble term to express all that Winnifred felt when this explanation of the difficulty gradually seemed most probable.

She was so angry that she was resolved to let the matter drop once and for all. No one should see that she was pining like Ariadne in Naxos, no one should guess that she was wearing the willow. Lady Clementina least of all. Therefore Winnifred went into the opposite extreme, and herself pointed out the paragraph in the newspapers to her stepmother.

‘Strange!’ her ladyship said, in a trembling voice, which might have easily betrayed her, had Winnifred been more self-possessed. ‘Strange! How do you account for all this?’

‘It does not need to be accounted for,’ Winnifred replied with all the *sang froid* she could assume, ‘except in the way that suits you best. I don’t wish to hear Mr. Gwynne’s name mentioned again, as long as I live.’

And there, so far as the members of the

Forsyth family were concerned, the affair for the present ended. Both Colonel Forsyth and Lady Clementina were delighted at the success of the stratagem, and they returned to London for the approaching season with something like joy in their hearts. Their consciences were a little sore still, but they hoped that by more judicious management the necessity for such underhand conduct might be avoided in the future. Lady Clementina, understanding how much she had been to blame, was resolved to lay the lesson to heart. In future, all ineligible people should be kept at a wholesome distance; and thus, at least indirectly and in a negative fashion, Winnifred might be prevented from drifting into mischief again.

But it was not easy to bring even this amount of pressure to bear upon Winnifred. She was now more unmanageable than ever. She had relapsed into all her old ways; indeed, her second state was far worse than her first. No one hitherto could have styled her 'fast;' nor was she really 'fast' now in

the full sense of the term, but she was wayward in the extreme, more than ever determined to be independent of all restraint. She panted, too, to be doing something; for movement, bustle, activity, to work hard at whatever came to hand.

Art no longer attracted her, and for obvious reasons. Her first impulse was to make a holocaust of all her drawing materials, to burn them as on a funeral pyre together with her dead love. But she could not bring herself to this. Grievously insulted as she deemed herself, art surely was not to blame. By-and-by her fingers might itch to resume the brush and pencil, her power of application might return; the implements and properties she had of late so lovingly wielded should lie by awaiting her good will.

She yearned for some fresh outlet for her energies, and in seeking for it thought she had found her vocation when she fell in with the reverend ritualist of a neighbouring parish. Doubtless an earnest good man at heart, and piously convinced he was prescrib-

ing the best medicine for a perturbed spirit when he enlisted Miss Forsyth and secured her assistance in the district visiting of the parish. Winnifred was enchanted at the vista of usefulness opened up to her; only poor Eggleton, her maid, was not so much pleased. If anything, Eggleton preferred art to ritualism; at least Swanwick's kept decent hours, and the house was in a respectable street. But to attend to her duties at St. Mary's, Winnifred was obliged to turn out at this Lenten season soon after daylight; and her maid was the only servant in the house she could order or persuade into calling her at the proper time. Mrs. Eggleton, again, was bound to accompany her mistress into the back streets and courts which were Winnifred's special charge, and if the consciousness that she would be doing good work supported the one, no such comfortable assurances consoled the other for traversing the dingy muddy roads, and facing many unmentionable evils of sight and smell.

Once or twice when this High Church

passion promised to develop into a nuisance, Lady Clementina protested feebly ; but she was then and there silenced by a burst of virtuous indignation from Winnifred, who threatened to enter for good and all a religious house affiliated to St. Mary's Church, unless she was suffered to pursue her path of duty unchecked.

How long this would have lasted, or whither it would have led her, it is difficult to say. But two things conspired nearly simultaneously to put an end to her parish work. The first was an unexpected declaration from the Vicar of St. Mary's, who, though ascetic and celibate by predetermination, was unable to resist the fascinations of Miss Forsyth ; and the second was an unfortunate *contretemps* with a fiery-faced virago in Cooper's Rents, Bloomsbury, who, taking Winnifred's crude but well meant advice in bad part, locked the young lady into a cellar for some hours, from which she emerged more frightened certainly than hurt, but with a settled resolve to leave district visiting for the future alone.

But now Easter was over, and the world claimed her once more. With the budding boughs and the songs of birds came that season of revelry which retains its attractions even to those who know the hollowness of its ring.

Winnifred went back to it all like an old warhorse, eager for the fray. Her winter mood of subdued demureness, the semi-fanaticism of the early spring, melted all at once before the fierce excitement of the London season at its height. This rapid whirl of gaieties was quite to her taste. Not a moment's rest, nor a second for quiet thought; but racing to and fro, driven on perpetually in the feverish round of the social mill. She never missed a ball or rout now; dancing once more became her absorbing passion, and she gratified it to the full. Partners had never been lacking to her, but now they came in troops, numerous and constantly increasing, many of them a source of the keenest anxiety to Lady Clementina, of misery far worse than the physical fatigue of waiting

till the small hours to take home her troublesome charge.

It was not only that Winnifred insisted upon dancing every dance, down to the very last, but she was quite reckless how often she danced with one particular man, or whether that particular man was acceptable to her stepmother or not. Provided he was a good 'mover,' Winnifred was satisfied ; if he bore her quips and sarcasms without a murmur she was all the better pleased, perhaps, but no *arrière pensée* of the 'undesirability' of certain individuals restrained her at all ; and this encouragement of harmless detrimentials, while it often instilled very false hopes into several ardent young hearts, kept Lady Clementina continually on the rack with fresh alarms.

Of all her friends new and old there was no one she welcomed more cordially than Major Burton. The Beau was in a measure behind the scenes ; he knew all about it, or almost all. Besides, he was sympathetic, not openly and in explicit language ; he was

much too diplomatic and judicious to broach delicate subjects without distinct encouragement, yet he made Winnifred comprehend that he was sorry for her and felt she had been in some way or other ill-used. As a man of the world he had drawn his own conclusions from her reappearance in society without a whisper of any engagement, following as it did the abrupt disappearance from Crinkleton. Something very serious had happened of course. Either the colonel had cut up rusty, or the man himself had behaved like a cad. This was the key to his attitude towards Winnifred. Taking it for granted she was disappointed and forlorn, he sought to be as consoling as he could. He was more than friendly, he was caressing even in his manner, talking to her generally as though she were a child of ten, and petting and patting her metaphorically upon the back. Upon the whole, she seemed to take the treatment in very good part.

To be the confidant and chosen friend of

an attractive girl is full of nameless charms, especially to a man like the Beau, for whom gallantry and flirtation, in some shape or other, had long been a principal object in life. But he really liked Winnifred, as he put it, 'above a bit ;' he was pleased to be with her as much as possible, gratified at seeing her eyes brighten when she greeted him, to know that she tolerated his jokelets, and appreciated his *petits soins*. By degrees they became very intimate ; in fact, and so far as was consistent with the condition of the case, inseparable 'pals.'

At first, no one noticed it much. Who noticed what Beau Burton did ? He was a species of tame cat whose attentions compromised nobody. Only Lady Clementina strongly objected, and showed her uneasiness by giving him the cold shoulder as much and as often as she could. The Beau did not care. Nor did Winnifred. Besides, there are many ways of evading chaperons in our modern manner of life, especially when one party to the flirtation is a reckless man-

about town, and the other a highspirited girl; so Major Burton managed to meet Winnifred here, there, and everywhere, right in Lady Clementina's teeth.

'You've lamed that horse of yours, Winnifred,' her father said, in high dudgeon, one morning at breakfast. 'It is just a chance whether he'll come round. I thought that was how it would be. He ought not to have been taken out of the stable yesterday.'

'I had promised to ride in the Row.'

'With whom, I pray?'

'That's my affair.'

'You know, I presume?' Colonel Forsyth asked of Lady Clementina.

'The Portloch girls, was it not?'

'No.' Winnifred would vouchsafe no more.

'Young ladies affect nowadays to do precisely as they please.'

'Precisely as they please,' repeated Winnifred, looking her father straight in the face.

No more was said.

Beau Burton had been her escort in the Row.

But there was one other person no unconcerned spectator of Winnifred's flirtations, and not indisposed, for various reasons, to do her an ill turn. This was the Duchess of Hammersmith.

Time was when her Grace had thought Winnifred harmless enough, had feared no rivalry from her, had thought the girl's character for coquetry unfairly and too freely bestowed. Now she began to perceive how dangerous Winnifred could be; and in a quarter perhaps which the duchess had specially fenced in and hoped to keep, like a private preserve, all to herself.

The fact was Mr. Crammersh, for the first time in his life, had come to London for the season, and taking a house in Berkeley Square, had been launched under her Grace's auspices into the best society of the town. Since the Smokingham festivities he had been like the tiger that has tasted blood. Never

before had he understood how delicious it was to associate with the best people, and be part and parcel of the *crème de la crème*. His life hitherto had been quite humdrum and retired. Business had absorbed him principally, but he had been careful also to devote a portion of his time to the society of his poor bedridden wife. Selfish, egotistical, purseproud, consequential, he had yet his better impulses, and one of these was gratitude and affection for the helpmeet who had stood by his side in the days before he had achieved his commercial success. If she was prevented from any active participation in the pleasures of prosperity, he was eager to make it up to her by personal devotion and attention as far as lay in his power.

Now she was gone. He had mourned her duly and decorously something more than the appointed time. Already, before we made his acquaintance at Smokingham, it had come home, with many forcible arguments, that he ought to marry again.

He wanted an heir. Some one to inherit

his wealth and to spend it. Some one to carry on the traditions of the colossal business he had created, perhaps add to them, and make the name of Crammersh as illustrious as that of Rothschild or Baring in the world of finance. Moreover, as he grew on in years he became more and more uxoriously inclined. Marriage presented itself in the light of a new and untasted pleasure. The constant companionship of a young lady of engaging manners, well bred and attractive, who would dispense gracefully his hospitalities, and give increased lustre to his belongings, would cheer also and brighten his declining years, and give him much solid joy besides.

The only question had been where and how to choose. He was in a position, naturally, to please himself. In his own native place, like the Grand Turk, Joe Smith, or the Great Mogul, he might throw the handkerchief to the one he preferred of a whole bevy of beauties, nearly certain that this condescending selection would be gratefully

and gladly received. There was no nonsense about Smokingham girls. Raised in an atmosphere of pounds, shillings, and pence, they knew intuitively the value of money, and could count up Mr. Crammersh exactly to an ounce. Hardly one but would have considered it a splendid termination to their maidenly career to be installed as mistress of Crinkleton, and fortified by munificent settlements against the woes of widowhood. They would have entered into business arrangements with Mr. Crammersh readily enough. But the facility of conquest rather cooled his ardour. None of us appreciate very keenly what it costs little trouble to obtain. He walked round and round as in his rose garden, admiring each blossom in turn, but nothing more, feeling that he might pick the one he preferred whenever he pleased. It would have ended, doubtless, in his making a bargain with a brother plutocrat for one of his daughters ; or, he might, perhaps, have bought a wife out and out like a slave or a chattel to be entirely and for ever his own.

Only he went to Burcham Paddox, and from henceforth ambition entered his soul. The only wife suitable to him in his new circumstances would be some fashionable and distinguished personage through whose assistance and connection he would be enabled to take his proper position in life.

Animated by such inspirations he naturally fell into the duchess's hands.

She had promised to start him fairly, and, certainly, she was as good as her word. Perhaps she found both profit and pleasure in socially financing this great millionaire—at least, she threw herself heart and soul into the scheme. Never had new loan or company limited or unlimited a more active promoter. She took him quite under her wing; recommended him the house he occupied, superintended the formation of his establishment, introduced him to her friends, made him free of her own house, where he was admitted upon terms of the most friendly intimacy, and always most cordially received.

It was pleasant enough all this. Pleasant

to walk down St. James's Street arm in arm with the duke, which under the special instructions of the duchess to her submissive spouse, the duke was ready at any moment to allow ; pleasant to appear nightly in the duchess's opera box, to be permitted to escort the Ladies Goldhawk when they rode in the park, to be a standing dish at all the entertainments at Hammersmith House.

He was not ungrateful for the favour shown him. He fetched and carried for the duchess, was docile, obedient ; her henchman body and soul. There was very little doubt, if she gave him hint or encouragement, he would propose to one of her daughters, to both if she insisted upon it, and be glad of thus escaping the invidious necessity of choosing between them.

These Ladies Goldhawk were both very superior people—clever and accomplished to the finger-tips. Years back they had realised that they must rely upon other than nature's gifts if they desired to please. Each therefore had taken up a 'line' of her own.

Lady Millicent worshipped music, and Lady Adeline had made politics of the most abstruse kind her study. Industry untiring and increasing as time rolled by barren of suitors, had made them both proficient in their respective hobbies. Lady Millicent had no rival among her peers as a performer upon the violoncello, and Lady Adeline was a centre of political activity to a crowd of prigs who aspired to control, some day, the destinies of the state.

It was their nicely balanced claims that confused Mr. Crammersh. He viewed them both with awe and respect, and was ready to fall at the feet of either—but, which, he was for a long time puzzled to decide. Smokingham was musical ; its annual festivals world-renowned ; Lady Millicent Crammersh would be received there with enthusiasm. On the other hand, he had his own secret ambition to take his place among the legislators of his country. The career of a Member of Parliament whose father-in-law was a duke, and whose wife had all the threads of political

sophistries at her fingers' ends, was, he thought, as good as assured. Besides which the duchess had often said, in so many words, that the party was under obligations to the Hammersmiths; the husband of a Goldhawk, if he voted straight, might some day expand into a cabinet minister and a peer.

The latter temptation proved the most potent, and Lady Adeline won the day. Mr. Crammersh's attentions to her grew more and more marked and particular. It was quite evident that ere long he would place Crinkleton and his whole fortune at her feet.

Those who dared, actually congratulated the duchess, and everyone talked of it quite as a *fait accompli*. Mr. Crammersh would in truth have gone like a lamb to his fate, had not chance once more thrown him into the way of Winnifred Forsyth.

Not the least of the kindnesses he owed the Duchess of Hammersmith had been the control of his visiting list. She had given him plainly to understand that he must know

only the people of whom she approved. The Forsyths were not entirely tabooed, but he was not encouraged to be intimate with them, and, in fact, had never entered their house. But the same prohibition could not well be extended to Lord FitzHugh, who was a county neighbour, and with whom obviously Mr. Crammersh desired to remain on good terms. An invitation to dine at his lordship's in Grosvenor Place, therefore, he could not possibly refuse.

Winnifred fell to him when the guests were marshalled for dinner. He had noticed her, in spite of himself, for Mr. Crammersh knew a pretty face when he saw one, and the recent nearly uninterrupted companionship with the plain-featured Ladies Goldhawks made him the more keenly appreciative. He had not dared to address her, however, till he offered her his arm.

Winnifred drew her own conclusions from his silent shyness, and attacked him at once.

'I hope you've got leave to come out to dinner, Mr. Crammersh,' she asked, with

a very meaning look, as they passed downstairs.

‘Leave, Miss Forsyth?’ Mr. Crammersh was in amazement.

‘From the duchess. I know she never lets you out of her sight. Don’t deny it, Mr. Crammersh. How nice it must be to go back to apron strings!’

‘Quite ridiculous, Miss Forsyth—preposterous. The Duchess of Hammersmith has been quite—what I may call, particularly—that is say, extremely considerate; but to state that her Grace in any way interferes or controls my independence of action would be altogether unwarranted by the facts of the case.’

All this, accompanied by fidgety gesticulation, and—they were now at table—repeated interference with knife, fork, glass, head, which he handled in turn.

‘Don’t be angry. It is we who should be angry with you.’

He looked round in alarm, as though he were being charged before the sitting magistrate with some serious offence.

‘Your conscience upbraids you ; I see it by your face. Have we not reason to be angry with you ? Two whole months—you see, I know, and yet you’ve never once been near us.’

‘I was coming. I have been promising myself the pleasure——’ Mr. Crammersh began.

‘But you were too much occupied with your fine friends. It was very base of you, Mr. Crammersh. Don’t you think other friends would have been equally glad to see you and renew their acquaintance ?’

There was a charm of subtle flattery in Winnifred’s tone. It was wonderful how encouraging and pleasant her ripe, sweet voice could sound, and thus it was now. Whatever her object—a malicious wish to thwart the duchess, or the desire to victimise Mr. Crammersh having just then the instinct of the female Ishmaelite strongly upon her, Winnifred was clearly determined on this occasion to be most agreeable and kind.

‘No, but really, Miss Forsyth, I have

been so much occupied. All day, every day, in fact. I was compelled much against my will to——'

'To talk counterpoint and Sebastian Bach with Lady Millicent Goldhawk, perhaps ; or, better still, to discuss the Conscience Clause of the Education Bill with Lady Adeline, or bulls and bears with the duchess herself? What a relief it ought to be to you to meet with a fool like myself.'

Mr. Crammersh made the most gallant bow he could muster up, and looked as if he wished he might oftener have the pleasure.

Indeed, they became very friendly before the night was out, so much so that Lady Clementina remarked it, and imparted the news to Colonel Forsyth.

'I should much like to ask Mr. Crammersh to dinner, some day soon. What evening would suit you, Ferdinand?'

'By all means ask him. Any night next week. But why?'

'He paid Winnifred so much attention at FitzHugh's. Did you not notice it?'

‘I? No. That’s not my business. I’m glad to see you make it yours.’

‘He is a very desirable pleasant person,’ went on Lady Clementina.

‘Undoubtedly. And he has an enormous fortune. A moor in Scotland, shootings in Yorkshire, a place on the Thames, a yacht, a factory, a newspaper—everything, in short, but——’

‘A wife,’ said Lady Clementina, ‘and that he is on the look-out for still. I really do not think the duchess has secured him. I don’t, indeed.’

Mr. Crammersh was always closely cross-examined as to his goings on, and the next day at Hammersmith House he had to give full details of the dinner party at Lord FitzHugh’s.

‘A bachelor party, of course?’

‘Not exactly.’

‘No? The Forsyths, I presume?’ cried the duchess, up in arms at once. ‘Did you take in Lady Clementina, or whom?’

‘Miss Forsyth.’

‘Indeed!’ There was much hidden under the word. ‘A very bold, forward girl, in my opinion, and I have no doubt in yours also. No sensible man, who knows what is due to himself, could possibly approve of her, or of her ways.’

Mr. Crammersh in his innermost heart approved highly of both. Winnifred’s voice was still ringing in his ears, and he was haunted by her eyes. But like a coward he denied his creed.

‘Certainly not, certainly not.’

‘Her flirtations are disgraceful. You saw yourself at Burcham Paddox how she behaved with that Major Burton, and before that and since, she’s always the same. Her “fastness” is deplorable. They’re too terrible, these modern girls, too terrible. *My* daughters are very different, thank heaven. *They* cannot be called modern girls.’

Both daughters were present ; both, perhaps, wished they were. No one, indeed, could accuse them of being exactly modern, either in their ideas or their age.

‘The second reading of the Exclusive Householders Co-operative Bill is fixed for the 17th, Mr. Crammersh. You would like to hear the debate, no doubt,’ said Lady Adeline.

‘Well, no ; I don’t think so.’ Mr. Crammersh was rather taken aback. ‘The fact is I shall be compelled to attend to some important matters on that night.’

‘Out of town ?’ enquired the duchess suspiciously.

‘Well, not quite. It is a matter of business, purely of business, but I shall be engaged very closely for some hours.’

The truth being that the Forsyths had asked him to dinner that night, and he had accepted the invitation gladly enough. But there was no need to tell the duchess. On the contrary, he devoutly hoped she might never know.

Nor did she until after the event. Only when the news reached her through the channel of officious friends, it had grown already into more sinister proportions. Mr.

Crammersh had dined with the Forsyths, that was bad enough. But infinitely worse was the report that he was now constantly at their house, that the Forsyths had dined with him, a *partie carrée* in Berkeley Square, that he had been seen more than once in very close and animated conversation with Winnifred at parties, in the park, at the play.

This was why the duchess began to take so much interest in Winnifred's affairs, and why she would have been glad to put a spoke in her wheel.

CHAPTER VII.

ALTHOUGH Crammersh was a backslider, the Duchess of Hammersmith would not cast him off utterly. He could be won over from the enemy best by fair means, she thought, and she redoubled her graciousness when he appeared at Hammersmith House, to which in truth he still constantly came.

Nor had she quite lost her influence over him. There were some crumbs of consolation in the knowledge that he was still so much under her thumb that anything, in reason, that she might order, he was ready unhesitatingly to perform. It was a stroke of genius on her part to insist on his giving a ball—a ball which should be unparalleled in magnificence, the most splendid known for years.

This was her sovereign will and pleasure.

It was expected of him she said, nothing less, in return for the civilities showered upon him since he had come to town. She might have added, but did not, that it was expected also of her, as it had been in many previous years, although she had never recognised the obligation. Balls of such dimensions are not given for nothing ; and the duchess had never been inclined to pay much more. The present was the first occasion on which she had found herself in a position to do exactly the right thing, without spending a sixpence of her own. The whole of the expense would be borne by Mr. Crammersh ; it would be Her Grace's part to invite the guests. A very fair compact perhaps, although some might say the profit went too exclusively to one side.

Very soon the affair became the talk of the whole town. The most surprising stories were circulated concerning it. No ordinary house would do. Rumour said Mr. Crammersh was in treaty for the Crystal Palace or the Albert Hall. There was a report even

that a bid had been made for Buckingham Palace just for the night ; that royal residence was standing empty, just as it had been for years before, and as it was likely to remain for years to come.

It was to be a fancy dress ball. This was Mr. Crammersh's idea, and the duchess fell in with it readily enough, although a little disturbed at the prospect of having to pay for a special costume. She was also worried to decide how she would appear. Something regal and imposing was what she wanted, and she was grateful to the wag who suggested the Queen of Sheba, till it was pointed out to her that she must black her face. Nor was Mr. Crammersh quite equal to the *rôle* of Solomon, which it was insisted, to carry out the unities, he should assume. Then Her Grace thought of appearing as Medea, giving to the Ladies Goldhawk the parts of the daughters of Jason ; but this was also rejected, lest it might be considered necessary to cut the duke into little bits and boil him. Madame Angot, the

Queen of the Halles, Semiramis, Boadicea, Cleopatra, Astarte, Catherine of Russia, Pope Joan, all in turn were discussed and rejected ; and it was at last decided she should go as a Venetian patrician dame, the duke to be doge, and Mr. Crammersh a victorious admiral returning from the wars.

Everyone was mad to be asked to Mr. Crammersh's ball, yet invitations were difficult to obtain. All the royalties just then in London were to be present, of course ; but as their number, owing to pressing engagements in other capitals, or a love of a country life, was rather limited, the quota was to be made up by special importation ; and there were doubts which would be the greatest lion, a Mohametan potentate, with an unholy taste for champagne, or a Christian king, just at the moment in exile and under a cloud. After them the leaders of society, the *haute volée*, were asked, as a matter of course ; lords and ladies, cabinet ministers, conquering generals, foreign ambassadors, Academicians, judges, dandies, all who came to the

surface and were counted as the cream of life. It was in the ruck, the great outside crowd, that the struggle was felt, and with this number the duchess desired to class the Forsyths, had Mr. Crammersh been more amenable on the point.

But the fear of Winnifred's ridicule and *badinage* armed him to resist the duchess.

'Of course, you won't ask *us*,' Winnifred had said to him a day or two after the ball was announced.

'Indeed, Miss Forsyth, the ball would not be complete without you.'

'And the duchess? Come, confess, hasn't she expressly excluded us from the list of invitations? Don't deny it. I see it in your face.'

That very morning the duchess had, in truth, hinted that there could be no necessity to ask the Forsyths. But Mr. Crammersh had not chosen to understand.

'I assure you, Miss Forsyth, you are to be one of the first to receive a card.'

'Something will happen to us at the ball,

then. I wonder whether the duchess has the pluck to poison us, or to throw vitriol in my face.'

'That would bring her under the law. Besides, what reason could she have for wishing to do you harm?'

'None that I am aware of,' Winnifred said, demurely casting down her eyes. 'Yet I am sure she hates me, and would injure me if she could. You know that, Mr. Crammersh. Hasn't she abused me to you, often enough?'

The sudden look she gave him was as keen as a knife-thrust, and could not be parried.

'Well, perhaps—that is, not exactly. But still, if she did—do you think it would affect me? I have too high an opinion of you, Miss Forsyth, to be easily influenced.'

'I am glad to hear you say that,' Winnifred answered, softly.

'You care for my good esteem?'

'Very much, indeed.'

Winnifred, wicked Winnifred! you are raising a tumult in this foolish man's heart it will not be easy to allay.

‘If I could but think that esteem would ripen and bear fruit ; if I might only hope that some day——’

‘Some day is a long day, Mr. Crammersh,’ said Winnifred, outspoken at once, and giving him her hand. ‘I am hardly worthy of your good esteem, but I value it. And I would ask you, whenever you hear hard things of me—when I am sharply criticised, blamed, condemned—I would ask you, if you do not care to champion me, to fight for me, at least do not condemn me too ; but wait, reserve your judgment till I have had the chance of speaking in my own defence. Will you promise me that ?’

‘Oh, only too gladly and cordially !’ cried poor Crammersh, with expansive delight. ‘And in return, you will perhaps be disposed to consider, to accept, to give me credit for——’

‘Anything you please,’ Winnifred said, laughingly. ‘I should think you might safely be trusted for a large sum.’

‘Will you trust me when I say all I have——’

‘To say? All you have to say ought to have been said before this!’ Winnifred cried, changing her tone, and with a little mocking laugh.

‘No, no; please be serious one moment longer!’ exclaimed Mr. Crammersh, nervously and evidently distressed.

‘Not another second—anything more must keep till, till—you find me again in a sentimental mood. The fit’s over now, thank goodness. Tell me some more about the ball. You are going as a Venetian admiral, I hear? Shall I tell you what I shall wear? It’ll bear telling—it’s the truth. All in white, with a gold band round my waist, and a bit of looking-glass in my forehead. What do you think of the notion?’

So Winnifred rattled on, anxiously raising a cloud of words like dust to make good her retreat from an embarrassing situation. Of course she knew that Mr. Crammersh was on the verge of proposal; but she did not want him to propose—not then, certainly, if at all. Little freebooter, she was now ranging

the seas under the black flag, capturing and sinking all the victims she came across.

Only one person took, unconcernedly as it seemed, all the shot she fired into him. More ; it was just possible that in him Winnifred might catch a Tartar, and might suffer the most seriously of the two.

This was Major Burton, with whom Winnifred continued to be on the most friendly terms. This friendliness, however, which was backed in the one by recklessness, in the other by sheer impudence and 'cheek,' precipitated a crisis which changed considerably the aspect of affairs.

It was a morning or two before the great ball, when Colonel Forsyth, who was not an early riser, met Winnifred, as he came down to breakfast, entering the house in her riding habit.

'Out already !' he cried. 'Where, pray, have you been ?'

'In the park.'

'Riding ?'

‘ Naturally. Who walks about nowadays in riding habits ? ’

‘ And, pray, what did you ride ? Did you hire ? ’

‘ No ; a borrowed horse.’

‘ Borrowed from whom ? ’

‘ Major Burton.’

‘ And he met you there ? ’

‘ Yes ; he met me there.’

Winnifred was undaunted by the furious light that gleamed in her father’s eyes. But Colonel Forsyth, enraged — this time not without reason—was prepared to read her a very severe lecture.

‘ Winnifred, I forbid you to speak to this Major Burton again. I insist upon this, most positively. Obey me, or you must take the consequences.’

‘ And they will be what ? ’

‘ I shall oblige you to leave London : you shall go to live abroad.’

‘ All alone ? I should like it.’

‘ Of course not by yourself ; we shall accompany you.’

‘Do so; with all my heart. You will miss London more than I shall.’

Winnifred spoke savagely; she was in rather a savage mood. Something had occurred that morning to put her terribly out of sorts.

So, although she tossed her head defiantly at her father as she left him, when she reached her own room she took herself very seriously to task. She had been greatly to blame. All this had been utterly wrong. Why had Major Burton pressed her to ride out with him? He had called it a lark. All larks were early birds. That was why she should ride in the park early. And the early morning was so good for her complexion he said—and more rubbish to the same effect. Then you meet such amusing people at that hour. Well-known men, celebrities who could not come out at any other time; lords and lawyers, busy during the day in cabinet or court house; journalists, inhaling fresh breezes after nights spent in keeping the world upon

its axis ; great financiers and city magnates, obliged to take their exercise before office hours. The Beau had a wide acquaintance with them, and pointed them out in turn. Jupiter, on a cob with a hogged mane ; Morton, the great tragedian, on a Shetland pony ; Fisch, the promising sculptor ; General This, employed just then in cleansing the War Office Augean stables ; Admiral That, endeavouring to float the Admiralty into calm waters.

Only that very morning Burton had stopped to speak to a curious old chap, whose appearance interested Winnifred greatly ; a hawk-eyed man, with long whiskers, and dressed in a pea coat and an old slouch hat. A great painter, Burton called him, and Winnifred begged to be introduced.

The salutation was odd.

‘ Good morning, Colonel,’ said the Beau.

‘ Mister ——’ growled the other.

‘ Mr. Colonel, then. That’s French English. Once a colonel, always a colonel, so

say I. This is Mr. and ex-Colonel Greate-
rex, Miss Forsyth, formerly of the Scarlet
Guards.'

The old gentleman had been on the
point of cantering away, when Winnifred's
name arrested him.

'Miss Forsyth? Miss *Winnifred* For-
syth?' A great emphasis on the Christian
name.

'I had often heard of you, Miss Forsyth,'
he said, simply in answer to her bow. Then
went on, abruptly,

'Seen the war news, Burton? Mag-
dala's captured.'

'No. Much fighting?'

'Short and sharp, soon over. You don't
take much interest in Abyssinia, perhaps,
Miss Forsyth?'

How keenly he looked at her!

'The least little bit only. As an English
woman, when fighting is going on, of course
one is interested.'

'Ah, you have no very particular friends
out there, I daresay. I have.'

‘Sir Robert, I think, is an old chum of yours?’ Burton said.

‘Yes, but my best friends are not soldiers now. I’m an artist. My friends are all artists. Do you ever see the “Picturesque News,” Miss Forsyth? Charming illustrations. Gwynne’s, Dominic Gwynne’s. You should see them.’

Again he looked very keenly at her; so keenly that she flushed scarlet. What did he know about it? Was this weird, cross-grained old gentleman in Dominic Gwynne’s confidence? Had she been made a common jest and laughingstock?

‘I hate the picture papers,’ she replied; ‘they’re so commonplace. I think, Major Burton. I must ask you to take me home. The morning is getting on, and we breakfast at half-past nine.’

All the way back to Brook Street, she snubbed Burton whenever he spoke. Anger was in her heart. First and chiefly against Dominic Gwynne. Then against his particular friends, who were doubtless deep

in his confidence, and permitted themselves therefore to despise her. Next her father's rebuke chafed her because it was well merited and just : last of all, when she began to understand how easily this silly escapade might be misconstrued, she was furious with Major Burton.

But of herself she was most thoroughly ashamed.

'I was wrong,' she said to Lady Clementina, stifling for the moment her contrariness. 'Why worry any more about it?'

'This Major Burton,' went on Lady Clementina, improving the occasion, 'he cares nothing. He amuses himself ; but what is sport to him may be death to you.'

'Yes, yes, I admit it all ; only let us take it all as said.'

'There is nothing a man likes so much as to *afficher* himself with a nice girl. Only——'

'The nice girl gets the worst of it. I know all about it. Please let the subject drop. I promise to keep this man at a distance for the future. I will cut him, if you

like. Is there any other form of penance you wish to prescribe? I am ready to prove my contrition.'

'Oh, Winnifred, if you would only consider how the time is slipping away. If you would only bring yourself to look at life a little more seriously——'

'In plain English, make some good man happy?'

'I mean that all this flirtation and philandering cannot go on for ever. One of these days you will sigh after the opportunities you have lost.'

'Do you think I care whether I become an old maid or not?'

'Perhaps not. But you scarcely realise, I fear, all the chances of the future.'

'So I am to sell myself in the present. Very worldly but no doubt very sensible advice. I shall remember it.'

'Profit by it, Winnifred. Do, and soon. Do not leave it till too late; opportunities never return. You have had so many chances. There was——'

‘Please do not go into details.’

‘Even this year, Lord Yellowborough would have come forward, if——’

‘If he had not preferred a Sandwich Islander, and an island-home in the dark blue sea. I was not cut out to live in a state of semi-savagery, in the society of a simpleton.’

‘Lord Yellowborough would have suited you exactly. I know he liked you, and you might have moulded him as you please.’

‘Thank you ; moulding’s not much in my line.’

‘Now there is Mr. Crammersh ; he’s always hanging about here, and his face beams for a whole week if you only throw him a good word.’

‘I’ll throw him lots, if they make him beam. I like to see him beam ; it’s better than seeing the sun through a fog.’

‘No, but really, this Mr. Crammersh is very nice and gentlemanlike, don’t you think ?’ Lady Clementina asked, a little nervously, afraid lest praise too open and

fulsome should drive Winnifred at once into opposition.

But Winnifred only nodded in reply, and made no further remark.

Her mind was busy. She was sifting, weighing, putting to the test the phrases which embodied Lady Clementina's worldly advice. Time, no doubt, was slipping away, and what was to be the end of it all? A long, dull vista stretched before. The only chance of real happiness she had lost, and through no fault of her own. The blame was Dominic Gwynne's.

That any man should have dared to treat her so! Once more her blood rose at the thought, as it had risen again and again. She, of all women, to be left in the lurch! But it should never be said that she had missed her mark. Sooner than carry such a reproach to the end of her days, she would take the first offer that came to hand—the first at least that was worth anything, and that it suited her to accept. No one should say that because one man had turned his

back upon her, she had folded her hands, put on sackcloth, and poured dust and ashes on her head.

She would marry someone, anyone; she would be as cold-blooded, calculating, and worldly-minded as her stepmother, and play at once for the biggest prize within reach. It was not too late, surely. The sun was still shining, the hay was still to be made.

But, in the first place, there must be a change, immediate and complete, in her demeanour and habit of life. No more encouragement of such compromising acquaintances as Major Burton. He was too injudicious; he might have intended no harm; but he had got her into a scrape of a kind no woman readily forgets or forgives. She would never again lay herself open to the strictures of those who bore her no good will, of people who would seize with delight the chance of tearing her reputation to shreds.

They were at it, however, at that very moment. While Winnifred, a prey to self-

reproach, was framing good resolves to be more circumspect in future, she was suffering sharply for the past.

A very animated conversation, of which she was the subject, was in progress at Hammersmith House.

‘You *would* ask those Forsyths,’ the duchess said, reproachfully, to Mr. Crammersh; ‘only this very morning I’ve heard the most shocking story about the girl.’

‘Mamma, hadn’t we better leave the room?’ said prim Lady Adeline.

‘Yes. How delicately sensitive you are, dear child.’

‘What has happened?’ Crammersh asked, doggedly.

‘Something so serious that I have my doubts whether I can consent ever to meet this Miss Forsyth, even under the roof of a friend. She shall never enter my house, nor shall I speak to her, or recognise her again.’

‘Dear me, this is very terrible!’ Mr. Crammersh was in anguish. ‘May I beseech your Grace to be more explicit?’

‘I can scarcely bring myself to repeat the story. Briefly, she has compromised herself most seriously with this Major Burton, whom you know. They have been seen together—but really, Mr. Crammersh, do not, I pray, do not insist upon the whole details.’

No one knew better than the duchess the damaging effect of half truths.

‘With Major Burton? Can it be possible that she has forgotten what is due to herself——’

Mr. Crammersh felt very unhappy. Jealousy perhaps predominated, for already he worshipped Winnifred more devoutly than was good for his peace of mind; but he was hurt, angry, with the duchess, with himself, with Winnifred most of all.

‘It is very perplexing,’ went on the duchess. ‘One hardly knows how to act. I ought to refuse to know her, but that would condemn her socially to worse than death. If there was the faintest doubt of the truth of the story—but I have it from

such a trustworthy source, that I cannot but believe.'

The mere mention of doubt was a relief to Mr. Crammersh. And as he began to hesitate he remembered Winnifred's words, 'Do not condemn me when you hear me blamed; wait till I can speak in my own defence.' No; he would not condemn her, not on the strength of a mere scandalous tale.

'I may be foolish, duchess, but I prefer to suspend my judgment.'

'You are much too simple, too confiding, Mr. Crammersh,' cried the duchess, in a cross tone.

How dare he question what she said?

'I prefer to wait,' Crammersh went on, stoutly. 'The charge is too vague. It ought to be formulated in plain language, substantiated and supported by the names of witnesses.'

'We do not proceed in the world as in a Court of Law. Our tribunals sit in secret, and from their sentence there is no appeal.

But we are not so fiendishly cruel as you would be. We act thus to spare the criminal the awful consequences of a full *expose*.'

Every word told upon Crammersh, yet he would not surrender his point.

'I should like, nevertheless, to judge for myself; either to hear the whole of the case from some one who will not shrink like your Grace from the details.'

'Wait till you see them together, this Major Burton and Miss Forsyth. You will have an opportunity to-morrow night, at your own ball. Even you, blind and unpractised, should be able to detect, from their manner to each other, how matters stand between them.'

There were many pairs of eyes ready to watch Winnifred's greeting of Beau Burton.

He came up to her, as soon as he could escape from his Prince, with quite an air of proprietorship.

'Which shall it be? Dance or sit out?'

'Neither.'

‘Rather *short*, eh, Miss Forsyth? Is that the time of day? What’s put your dander up?’

‘Your language is more disgusting than usual, Major Burton. I shall not talk to you if you use such gibberish.’

‘Something gone wrong I suppose. They wouldn’t give it its tea, or they took away its coral or its bells.’

‘Yes; the bells, for you to wear.’

‘Come, Miss Forsyth, let’s put up our swords. You promised me the first six vales. Dancing is better than fighting, at least with me. I *can* dance, you know.’

‘But not fight. Is that because you are a courtier, not a soldier?’

‘Come; the music has begun,’ he went on, undaunted.

‘I withdraw the promise; I don’t mean to dance.’

‘Not at all?’

‘Not with you.’

The Beau was not easily taken aback, but this peremptory language made his

cheek tingle as though it had been boxed. He made one more attempt, however.

‘Do you think of riding again to-morrow?’

‘Certainly not; and I ought not to have ridden with you to-day, or at all. You know that as well—or better than I do. You have presumed far too much upon my goodnature.’

‘I am ready to make you all the reparation in my power.’

‘How, pray?’

‘By asking you to be my wife.’

‘*You!*’ cried Winnifred, with a laugh she did not try to restrain.

This mockery was too much for the little Beau. A man may be cool as a cucumber, armour-plated by conceit, and yet vulnerable to ridicule. Winnifred’s laugh completely routed Major Burton. His face changed colour, his eye twinkled with a short-lived resentment; but recovering himself rapidly, he gave one short, nearly inarticulate whistle, said nothing, and went his way.

Lady Clementina was one of the spectators of this scene. She had not heard the words, but she could gather from the look on the Beau's face that he had got his *congé*, in language he could not misunderstand. She was overjoyed, and came to tell Winnifred so.

'Yes ; I gave him a bit of my mind,' said Winnifred. 'No more kicking over the traces, Lady Clementina. I am broken in, tamed, quiet to ride and drive.'

Mr. Crammersh was another who had watched, with no little anxiety, what had passed. That the major's rebuff had given him the keenest pleasure was evident from the way in which he shouted out, as soon as he got an opportunity of speaking to her alone :

'I knew it was all a parcel of lies.'

'Really, Mr. Crammersh, your plain speaking is startling, if refreshing. And these—lies—to whom did they refer ? To me ?'

'Exactly.'

'And you were disposed to believe them,

I have no doubt. Is that the way you kept your promise to me ?'

'I refused to believe them. I did indeed. I was certain they were exaggerated, by the ill-nature, the malice, the vicious gossip of unscrupulous people.'

'Thank you. Perhaps now you will tell me what "they" refers to.'

'No, no, Miss Forsyth. I ought not. I dare not. I cannot.'

The last was the most exact phrase ; he could not because he did not himself know.

'I was weak enough, in a fit of reckless defiance of conventionality, to ride in the park, before breakfast, with Major Burton. That was my offence ; was it very heinous ?'

'I knew you were above reproach, Miss Forsyth. I fought for you through thick and thin ; I did, indeed I did,' said Mr. Crammersh, gleefully.

He was more than rewarded by the bright look of gratitude she gave him. And he continued in high favour for the remainder of the evening. There were crowds of other

guests. No matter. Mr. Crammersh left others to do the honours, and, for himself, never left Winnifred's side.

Of course it was a clear case of 'smite.' Everybody noticed it. Some laughed unreservedly at Winnifred's newest triumph; others roundly abused her for openly setting her cap at the great Croesus; a few, like the Duchess of Hammersmith, writhed with disappointment and rage; while Bobby Burton put his tongue in his cheek, and winked, as much as to say he was delighted to have escaped by the skin of his teeth.

Colonel Forsyth and Lady Clementina would have been in the seventh heaven but that they distrusted Winnifred, and feared that she would never really accept Mr. Crammersh, although she might encourage him for years. For months, certainly, she kept him in suspense, hanging on and off, to-day expectant, to-morrow in misery. Wherever the Forsyths went, he followed. When he could he pressed his own hospitalities upon them. They yachted with him, spent weeks at

Crinkleton, visited him on the Thames, went down with him to Scotland, where the colonel fished his rivers and shot over his moors.

Over and over again, by innuendos, by open attacks, now almost by threats, now, and more often, by beseeching petitions almost on their knees, did her parents beg Winnifred to decide. But she held out through it all. Why? She did not know. What was she waiting for? She could not tell.

Then just when all parties concerned, save and except herself, were nearly in despair, suddenly, and without rhyme or reason, she relented, and promised, at no remote day, to give Mr. Crammersh her hand.

CHAPTER VIII.

So WINNIFRED consented to sacrifice herself upon the altar of Mammon. What would she have said if anyone had told her a year or two back that this was how it would end? Indignation would have been too moderate a word to express her feelings. To marry for money! To swear to love, honour, and obey a man, not because he was all the world to her, but merely because he possessed all that was supposed to make the world enjoyable! Faugh! the bare notion would have filled her with loathing and contempt for herself. Even now, when it came plainly before her, it nearly choked her. All her strength of mind was needed to stifle and put back the strong uprisings of remorse which again and

again asserted themselves and almost overmastered her. Mean, cowardly, base, unmaidenly—these were the epithets which when thus agitated she heaped upon herself. Often these misgivings shook and agitated her so terribly that she was brought to the verge of distraction. At such times she very nearly resolved to put an abrupt termination to the engagement, and leave Mr. Crammersh to his fate.

But she was too proud to do it ; too proud, and too much compromised. Besides, she had passed her word : how could she go back from it, at least with no better excuse to offer than her own capricious will ? And after all, the man might have been much worse. He was so desperately fond of her too—worshipping, to use his own high-flown language, the very ground upon which she trod. Obedient, moreover submissive, scarcely daring to express an opinion of his own, anxious only to defer to her in every particular, to humour her, to forestall her every wish, to win by the unstinting gratification of her lightest behest

a languid smile of approval or one cold word of thanks.

He would have overloaded her with presents if she had but let him, with rich gifts lavished upon her with right royal generosity, but she obstinately and studiously refused to accept them. So the tradesmen lost a chance of munificent custom, the diamond merchants, Garrards, Howell and James, the bric-brac shops, all Wardour Street, Bonham, Christie's and all the leading art-auctioneers. He was perpetually enquiring whether she liked this or that, a toy, an ornament, or a pet. Once when she weakly confessed a craving for an ugly pug dog, all the dog-fanciers in and about Seven Dials were drawn upon to supply the best specimen money could buy; if she had only hinted a desire to own a monkey or two, a giraffe, a marmoset or a polar bear, Jamracs would have been ransacked, or overtures made to the Zoo.

But her determination to refuse everything was for a long time invincible; she could not take his presents yet; it was pre-

mature, and savoured of bribery and corruption. By-and-by, when they were married, it would be his privilege to give and hers the right to ask for anything she pleased. But till then she preferred to retain her independence, to remain unbought, free as air. This brusque and persistent rejection of his well-meant offers hurt Mr. Crammersh to the quick. It was his only way of showing the affectionate esteem in which he held her. There could be no real loverlike sympathy between this curiously mated pair. He did not dare to bestow, if Winnifred indeed would have suffered it, those caresses and comforting assurances which would have been the most princely gifts from anyone who had really touched her heart. Once or twice at rare intervals she just permitted him to touch her cold cheek with his lips, but his endearments began and ended there. The soft words of blissful contentment, the melting glance, the warm pressure of the hand, which are among the most eloquent expressions which true love can employ, were altogether denied to

him. He could fall back only upon ample largess; by opening his purse-strings wide and freely could Mr. Crammersh prove the depth and sincerity of his attachment. To be cut off persistently from this substantial outlet for his feelings nearly drove him to despair.

Lady Clementina took her to task rather timidly, declaring that such over-scrupulous refusal was ridiculous, in bad taste, that it would offend her *fiancé*. He might be offended, Winnifred said; she did not want to marry him, it was he who wished to marry her. Her father spoke also, asking whether Winnifred meant also to refuse proper settlements, and all that; whether she wanted no jointure, no town-house, no proper establishment provided in advance, so that she might, on marriage, make her proper appearance in the world.

Upon these points Winnifred was less obdurate. She was ready to yield, a little reluctantly perhaps, to the extent of accepting whatever she might honestly and fairly receive; all that she knew would return to the man who gave them—house, carriages, horses;

in all these Mr. Crammersh would himself directly share, they would in fact be his own property, to which she could lay no claim of even part-proprietorship until after she had taken the fatal plunge. By all means let the house be taken, the sooner the better ; and it might be decorated, she was ready even to give her advice upon that point, and she had no objection to see the horses, nor to visit the coach-builders, and decide upon a victoria, a brougham, a chariot and a barouche. Mr. Crammersh was at last in the seventh heaven of delight. Miss Forsyth should please herself, he would put no limit to her choice. She should have the house wherever she preferred, it should be done up regardless of expense, it should be the most magnificent and the best mounted establishment in the town.

Winnifred soon found that there was some fun to be got out of all this. Singularly unmercenary, she was yet perfectly alive to the value of money. And there was a delicious sensation, certainly, in having an unlimited

supply of it. Mr. Crammersh's liberality amounted to little less than this. Already she realised that there were some compensations for the sacrifice she had brought herself to make. She was discounting her future, enjoying substantial cash advances, unmindful quite of the day for settling accounts.

She looked so far ahead, however, as to calculate that with all its drawbacks the position she would occupy as the wife of a fond Cræsus would not be without a certain charm of its own. Ambition should take the place of love ; she would enjoy the prestige of a leader of society, carving out success for herself as she thought she could, and leaving silly sentimentalities and other foolishness to girls of weaker stuff. Her house should be one of the most frequented, the most popular in the town. It should be the centre of all that was great and glorious ; she would gather round her leading politicians, the nicest girls, the best intellects, the most attractive people ; the first musicians, the finest painters (one

alone excepted, however celebrated he might become), actors and authors, poets or novelists, sailors and soldiers springing into fame; bishops, judges, explorers African or Arctic, journalists who swayed the world. Her entertainments should be the gayest and most brilliant in the season; royalties should be glad to come to them, and duchesses and dowagers should humble themselves for invitations; the most exclusive dandies should throw over the longest engagements on pain of never being asked again. She would be the great lady patroness of all the arts, a female Mæcenæ, courted, admired, receiving homage and obeisance from all sorts and conditions of men.

But the first indispensable condition was a permanent establishment in London. Mr. Crammersh had never possessed a town-house, having no need for more than the bachelor chambers to which reference has already been made. Now, however, he was eager to make up for lost time: he would rent, buy, or build according as it might be

necessary in order to provide his future wife with exactly what she required. Miss Forsyth had only to choose the locality she preferred—she should have the best house standing on it that money could purchase, or one should be erected for her regardless of cost.

The sport of house-hunting may be, like olives and caviare, an acquired taste, but it was wonderful how soon Winnifred took to it, and how long it was protracted when she discovered its delights. It was, of course, to be distinctly understood that she would decide upon nothing in a hurry. She meant first to inspect and examine every hole and corner available. All the best house-agents were pressed into the service, and every post brought a dozen orders to view. Private friends were also enlisted, and their advice eagerly sought. Little Mr. Gryll's, for instance, who descanted for hours on the comparative advantages of neighbourhoods, the value of houseproperty, and the style of edifice best suited for the Crammershs' establishment.

‘Why not try Harley Street?’

Winnifred turned up her nose.

‘We’re not going to practise medicine. I’d as soon live in Bloomsbury.’

‘There are some excellent mansions in Bedford Square,’ hazarded Mr. Crammersh.

‘No doubt, if you wanted to open a business in boots and shoes,’ said Winnifred.

‘Well, then, try Cavendish Square—it’s close at hand, and the value of property is increasing day by day. It’s gone up seventy-five per cent. since only the other day. There was Grampians, now, he has a house there; when he came to town, I give you my word, the neighbourhood was positively all in rags. He came to town, and he went to Dilbury, the auctioneer, and Dilbury said he had got just the place to suit him, and so it was. In Cavendish Square. And what’s its worth now? five thousand upon his first purchase—value gone up like a sky-rocket. Cabinet ministers live there, and the house that used to be an hotel at the corner has been taken for the Japanese Embassy.’

‘I’ve no objection to Cavendish Square, except that we’re late in the day if prices have gone up so high.’

‘What do you say to Belgrave Square?’ suggested Lady Clementina; ‘very handy for the park, and near the shops.’

‘I don’t mean to live in the park, and I detest shopping.’

‘It’s the least objectionable on the score of drainage,’ said Colonel Forsyth, who considered no part of London was really safe from a sudden outbreak of typhoid fever.

‘All newly-made ground,’ said little Mr. Grylls. ‘I can remember when we went there to shoot snipe, and I’ve taken my pony down there, I give you my word, and practised him leaping over the marsh drains.’

‘There is no part so healthy or so well drained as the Cromwell Road district.’

‘Why, it’s miles,’ cried Winnifred. ‘Who would come to see us, do you suppose, if we lived out there? We might as well bury ourselves at Smokingham at once.’

‘I myself should prefer to build,’ said

Crammersh, magnificently. 'You can be sure then of your main drains as well as of your accommodation.'

'Yes, but where?' asked Winnifred. 'In Park Lane, or Grosvenor Square, which I should much prefer, you'd never find a site.'

'But in Kensington, now—good air and plenty of space.'

'A real Queen Ann, architect Mr. Norman Shaw; walls, deep red brick with blue china let in, small windows, and a high roof. Yes, there are attractions in that suggestion, provided you get me the house opposite as well.'

'Why on earth, Winnifred?' enquired Lady Clementina.

'So that I might look when I pleased at my new possession. Its façade would be its chief merit, and you could only see that properly from over the way; one might join the policeman on his beat, certainly,' went on Winnifred, meditatively, 'or drive slowly up and down all day in front of it.'

'If you won't discuss the thing seriously,' said Colonel Forsyth——

‘—There is nothing more to be said, I suppose. Never mind, father. There shall be a truce to buffoonery. One serious and fatal drawback there is to be building—the delay.’

Mr. Crammersh beamed ; this implied that Winnifred did not wish to throw obstacles in the way of a speedy marriage. ‘No new home could be ready for occupation under three years, and I should like ours to be ready next season.’

‘So it shall, without fail,’ replied Crammersh, ‘if you will only decide soon.’

‘Soon’ meant another three weeks at least, during which the search continued unchecked. All through Mayfair, in Belgravia, in the regions north of the park. If a place was nearly satisfactory there was sure to be one fatal defect which condemned it. Sometimes it was one thing, sometimes another. Here the house was evidently too conventional, the first floor had double drawing-rooms, and above them tier upon tier of bedrooms rising right into the sky. In the next

there was no boudoir, or it was not *en suite* with the principal bedrooms, or there was no lift from the kitchen, and the roof would not take off on the plan of the last contrived music-hall upon the Surrey side. The dining room was too big, or the kitchen too small, the offices detestable, the servants' rooms no better than pigsties. Then she set her heart upon Carlton House Terrace, because there was absolutely nothing to be got there, and was nearly taking an empty club-house in Pall Mall, sooner than be baulked of the locality she pretended to prefer. Then St. James Square attracted her, next a corner house in Piccadilly, and last of all Portland Place. Here, finally, they found a house as nearly perfect as house could be, so entirely satisfactory that Winnifred could advance no more plausible objections than that the stables were too remote, and the underground railway too unpleasantly near, but beyond these minor evils she was graciously pleased to waive further opposition, and the house was taken on a long lease.

Its furniture and decoration were the points next to be considered. Here Winnifred was just in her element, fanciful perhaps as ever, but with clear views and an admirable taste, which kept an imagination that might have run riot within proper bounds. The whole of the interior of the house was to be done up *de novo*, and the job was put into the hands of an art decorator, a man once upon the high road to fame as a painter, but who had found fortune was to be reached more rapidly as the working partner in a large firm of art upholsterers. The houses he decorated were certainly works of art in themselves, and finding Winnifred thoroughly appreciative, he was eager to do his best for Portland Place. Long deep discussions followed. Winnifred had much to say about wall space, dado, and frieze; this colour was to be carefully tabooed, and that toned down. She was nice in her choice of mantelpieces, in her love for old oak, her eagerness for the best modern stained glass; the dining-room was to be old Spanish leather, brown velvet, and Chippen-

dale chairs; the drawing-room sage green and pale blue.

Mr. Crammersh was awe-stricken and nearly overpowered. He seldom presumed to interfere or advise, only he desired to contribute as far as possible to the art 'properties' of the establishment, and with this in view gave a general commission to all the best brokers to secure for him the best bits of *vertu* that might come into the art market, where perhaps such *vertu* is more easily encountered than in the fashionable world, and brings something very substantial as its own reward. He wished also to assist in the pictorial decoration which Winnifred proposed to make a leading feature in the new house.

Mr. Crammersh bountifully offered to dismantle the Crinkleton Gallery and transplant his pictures to London in a body—his priceless gems by the men Christison told him were the leading painters of the English School. But, strange to say, Winnifred was first utterly indifferent, then distinctly refused to let any one of them come to Portland

Place. What did she want if these were not good enough for her ? an Ansdell ? he should have a commission for the best thing he could turn out. Or perhaps a subject by Armitage might suit her, a Herbert, or her portrait by Sir Francis Grant ? No, none of these. Pictures she meant to possess—plenty of them, but she would choose them for herself ; she would not be led by the nose, she did not care for second-rate stuff to which common cant gave a fictitious value. She would seek out new men and fresh work, the product of original thought, treated unconventionally, possessing that nameless charm of sympathy and deep feeling which makes a picture by a true artist eloquent as the music of a simple ballad set to a tender air. These men it should be her privilege to encourage ; they should carry out her ideas, not with servile execution, but according to their own taste and judgment. These ideas were to set rooms and space apart for special subjects. The walls of the hall and the grand staircase were to be hung with a series repre-

senting the progress of the young Prince in the Palace of the Sleeping Beauty; her own private boudoir was to be exclusively Italian landscape; in the drawing-room as many panels as were required were to embody the scenes in Tennyson's Palace of Art; now and again in the early exhibitions she found a picture which fitted into the general scheme, and was at once secured. But no very comprehensive selection could be made until the commencement of the proper art season, which follows in this country the processes of nature, and opens like spring flowers in the early days of May. To this Winnifred eagerly looked forward, and Mr. Crammersh also when he found how the land lay.

As he was known to be a buyer on a large scale, he had of course unbounded facilities for obtaining information, and was welcome at every studio he cared to visit. In these rounds he now spent much of his time, for he found that it was when he came to Brook Street brimful of art gossip that Winnifred greeted him most cordially. Some-

times she bore with him as if he had been a doubtful tooth, half resigned, half threatening if he became more actively disagreeable to have him out, be done with him altogether. But when he had anything new to tell of the preparations for the coming Academy she listened to him with positive pleasure, and so encouraged him to continue to deserve these rare marks of her approval.

One day, at lunch, when upon the same familiar topic, the conversation took an unexpected turn. Without one word of warning, Mr. Crammersh said abruptly to Winnifred :

‘ I think I have heard you say you took an interest in the work of Dominic Gwynne ? ’

Winnifred looked him straight in the face to detect whether satire or double meaning was latent in these simple words. Lady Clementina somewhat uneasily laughed a little short laugh of approval at Fido as the easiest way of covering confusion.

‘ Isn’t he natural, the darling ? No, no more, good doggie ; no, poor little mannie.’

‘ I did once,’ said Winnifred, with decision.

Why should she burke the subject? 'I thought him a painter of great promise, but he seems to have done nothing much as yet.'

'There are so many of whom great things are prophesied who fail utterly in the long run,' went on Lady Clementina. 'There was Seeley Hutchinson, who painted that flight of crows which the great art-critic called the finest thing since "The Descent from the Cross;" he has done nothing to speak of since.'

'Why did you speak of Mr. Gwynne?' Winnifred said, with resolute hardihood, to Lady Clementina's evidently increasing discomfort.

'He has nearly completed a very excellent picture. So I am informed by Christison; and I was disposed—half disposed—he looked very deprecatingly and doubtfully at Winnifred, as if he did not dare to suggest its purchase without her previous consent.

'To buy it? Why not, if you like it? You have seen it?'

'Well, no, not exactly—that is to say; Christison has.' Only through such spec-

tacles could Crammersh see and appreciate art.

‘How is it we have not heard of it sooner?’ asked Lady Clementina, feeling bound to say something.

‘Gwynne has only just brought it over. The greater part of it was painted in Paris, where he has been for some months. I thought of going to see it some day soon. Perhaps you would not care to go?’ he said rather humbly to Winnifred.

‘If it’s good really, you ought to secure it,’ she replied promptly. ‘The man, perhaps, deserves a helping hand.’

There were some crumbs of comfort in the notion of patronising and playing the Lady Bountiful to this old lover of hers who had used her so ill.

‘I think I should like to be one of the party,’ Lady Clementina put in. She had been in a fever of discomfort since the commencement of the conversation. All along the fear had oppressed her lest this man might return and in some way or other

obtain access to Winnifred : mutual explanations might follow, the trick of the dishonest letter would be exposed, and all the fine edifice built up with so much pains would forthwith tumble down into the dust. It might be as dangerous as it would certainly be inefficacious to openly oppose Winnifred's visit to Mr. Gwynne's studio ; but Lady Clementina felt that by being present herself she might manœuvre so as to ward off mischief should any threaten. Perhaps, too, she might gather from Dominic's demeanour whether he accepted his refusal as final and with a good grace, and from Winnifred's whether resentment at the fancied slight put upon her had really swallowed up and annulled the softer feelings she once confessed to entertain towards him. But she went so far as to sound Winnifred beforehand, and to see, if possible, how the land lay.

‘ Mr. Crammersh seems quite bent upon this visit. You do not mind going, I trust ? ’

‘ Certainly not. Why should I mind ? ’

‘I only thought you might not like to meet this Mr. Gwynne any more,’ went on Lady Clementina, a little timidly.

‘There is no earthly reason why I should not meet him,’ Winnifred responded rather curtly.

‘I remember that once you felt he had behaved very discour——’

‘What does it matter what I may once have felt? Besides, this visit is purely a matter of business. He has goods to dispose of which we propose to take off his hands at a price. I shall go to his studio as I would to my milliner’s when she returns from Paris with her stock of spring goods.’

And this was the spirit which animated her as she swept with all the dignity she could muster into the Gower Street lodging, where Dominic had temporarily set up his tents. There was a studio built out into the background which he rented from an old friend, and he was at work there when his visitors arrived.

‘He’ve got a model,’ said the servant-

maid, as she asked the party into a small waiting-room.

‘We come by appointment,’ Crammersh replied grandly. ‘Mr. Gwynne, I believe, expects us. Say Mr. Crammersh.’

His name was a ‘sesame’ at sound of which every studio door ought surely to fly open. But this door did not open, not immediately, and the delay made those who waited somewhat uncomfortable: Crammersh was ruffled, because his self-importance was in a measure attacked. Lady Clementina was apprehensive with fears which, being vague, were all the more keen. Winnifred, last of all, began to fear that in coming she had taken a step which might be misconstrued.

‘I beg your pardon,’ said a well-known voice, speaking in courteous but not particularly apologetic tones,—‘I beg your pardon, Mr. Crammersh, but I was painting on an intricate bit of flesh, and thought you would not——’

Thus far on the threshold of the little ante-chamber, and before he made out clearly

that there were ladies with Mr. Crammersh. Then he entered, and found himself face to face with Winnifred Forsyth.

A pause followed, an awkward pause, which Lady Clementina, with the readiness of a woman of the world, hastened to break as she came forward with outstretched hand.

‘Oh, Mr. Gywnne, it is ages since we met, but we had heard great things of your noble work—it is the talk of all London, and as Mr. Crammersh was good enough to ask us to accompany him, we ventured to draw upon your goodnature, thinking you would forgive us—*so* glad to meet you again.’

And then they shook hands. Why not? Dominic knew of no reason why he should refuse to take her hand, and sooner than have a scene this well-trained woman would have given him her head as well as her hand.

‘It is an honour which I appreciate,’ said Dominic, simply. ‘Pray come into the painting room.’

He had bowed only to Winnifred a cold

formal recognition, which she acknowledged by a greeting as stately and frigid as if he had spoken to her in a railway carriage without an introduction.

‘Winnifred you remember, of course?’ Lady Clementina went on with a gracious wave of the hand. It was better to ignore entirely what had passed, to wipe out the old relations and make a fresh start.

‘Yes,’ said Dominic. ‘I believe we have met before, but I cannot for the moment remember exactly where.’

A ridiculous, contemptible speech. Winnifred burnt with resentment, while Lady Clementina was half disposed to like the man for his cool self-possession.

‘We hear you have a picture to sell,’ said Winnifred, taking Mr. Crammersh’s arm to emphasise the plural pronoun. The gesture indicated plainly the approaching partnership of which Dominic had already heard rumours, while the tone was one of condescending patronage, and intended evidently to dwarf Dominic into a mere tradesman.

The painter winced a little, but without further remark led the way into the studio, where for some minutes he buried himself at his easel, winding up wheels, and moving the canvas round to bring it into a better light. Then coming to the front he joined the three spectators who had taken up the attitudes most natural to them. Lady Clementina had both her hands to her eyes, first shading them vertically, then horizontally, using them next as opera-glasses, and putting her head on one side as if she was suffering from acute rheumatism, or, at least, a crick in the neck. Mr. Crammersh, with Winnifred's hand still on his arm, was bending forward and looking into the canvas as though he wished to smell it to decide the value of the picture by the consistency of the medium, or the quality of the paint. Winnifred held herself perfectly straight with head thrown rather back, and an air of defiance. She seemed prepared at all costs to condemn either with criticism openly hostile, or by that faint damning praise which is more hurtful than any outspoken abuse.

Now, for the first time, Dominic allowed himself to look at her. Admiration, even after all that had occurred, he could not of course withhold. She was more brilliantly beautiful than ever, but more stately and prouder in her demeanour, as she was also decked out in braver apparel than it had been her wont hitherto to wear. Her dress to-day was somewhat remarkable. From reasons best known to herself—mere chance, love of display, or the wayward desire to appear in colours unsuitable to the occasion—she had made vivid scarlet, a rich strong cardinal red, the prominent tint in her costume. Her dress was trimmed with dark fur, certainly, and she wore a mantle of black velvet and more rich fur, but there was enough scarlet about her to have furnished forth several soldiers' coats. A splendid piece of colour, vigorous and pronounced, throwing up brilliantly the freshness of her complexion, and giving a surprising dignity and queenliness to her bearing, but having in this quiet little studio, with its unobtrusive tints, a garish and most violent

effect. As for the great picture upon the easel, which had been painted uniformly throughout in the most tender and delicate tones, its colour was killed, absolutely put out, destroyed, as the sun streaming through the window panes extinguishes the burning fire.

She had done it on purpose, of course, Dominic found himself saying, and he liked Winnifred none the better for it. Over and over again in times past they had talked upon the question of appropriateness in apparel, Winnifred invariably leaning towards simplicity in colour and design, and this somewhat flagrant departure from her fixed principles was clearly and intentionally unkind. The picture could never be more unfairly treated, not even should the Academicians hang a battle-piece above and below it, and on either side a general officer and a judge in ermine and crimson robes. No wonder it looked pale, that the dusky faces of the Lotos Eaters turned to chalk, that the warmth fled from the pure luminous sunset sky, that the pink snow-capped peaks turned stone

cold, and the masses of positive colour here and there upon the persons of the Greek wanderers faded into dull muddiness.

For some moments there was an absolute silence. Winnifred felt in her heart that she was in the presence of a masterpiece. The sentiment of the picture almost took her by storm, yet she set her teeth close, and resolutely refused to utter a word of praise. Lady Clementina was silent in that mute ecstasy, her eyes upturned as if in thankfulness for mercies vouchsafed in which persons of few ideas find a ready escape from the difficulties of precise expression. Crammersh had nothing to contribute towards the criticism of the occasion beyond a monotonous—'m—ah!' as he stroked his chin, and wagged his head slowly from side to side.

Then Lady Clementina, feeling it to be imperative that some one should speak, said—

'Well, I *do* think. Don't you think, Mr. Crammersh?' as if her unaided intellect was quite incapable of adequate thought to the occasion.

‘Undoubtedly,’ replied Crammersh, with praiseworthy readiness, ‘I certainly think ;’ but he also hesitated to say what he thought, and in his turn looked to Winnifred, upon whom therefore fell the burden of opening the case.

She responded in cold measured accents : ‘It is a fine picture, no doubt, meritorious, painstaking, but ’—there was as much courteous disapproval in this single ‘but’ as it was possible to convey in one short word.

‘Miss Forsyth is an admirable critic,’ Crammersh said to Dominic, half apologetically, half to encourage Winnifred to speak her mind more plainly. ‘Quite an artist herself ; draws beautifully, you know, and paints.’

‘Indeed,’ said Dominic, without any enthusiasm at the unexpected news.

‘Surely, you remember—we both took lessons from you, Mr. Gywnne, at Pallanza,’ said Lady Clementina ; ‘and you were so good as to say then that you thought, if we persevered——’

‘Now you mention it, Lady Clementina, I recollect. Did you go any further with it?’

‘Oh, yes; I could never abandon my beloved art;’ and Lady Clementina clasped her hands in rapture; ‘but Winnifred has dropped it entirely.’

‘Young ladies are not notorious for constancy,’ said Dominic, with a smile on his lips and bitterness in his heart. ‘No doubt Miss Forsyth found other more engrossing amusements, and her art taste rapidly evaporated.’

Winnifred pretended not to have heard, she was whispering to Mr. Crammersh, but Dominic’s words had gone straight home to her heart. She would make him change his tone, and prove incontestably that her hands had not forgotten their cunning, that she could be something of an artist still when she chose.

Crammersh had asked her *sotto voce* whether she was not disappointed. ‘It hardly comes up to your expectation, I fear?’

‘I won’t say that,’ Openly before Dominic, nothing would have induced her to praise, but behind his back her honesty was too strong for her pride. ‘There is no question about the power of the picture; the conception is original, but I am not quite satisfied with the execution. It is like a fine poem marred by printer’s errors. And the principal female figure is ungraceful and the drapery stiff. Her face is forbidding almost in its reckless contemptuous scornfulness. I could not bear to look at that often. It’s too painful!’

‘Perhaps he’ll take it out,’ said Cramersh, who had a notion that figures and faces, and the relative positions in a picture and so forth, were a mere matter of detail and might be left to chance like plums in a pudding. ‘We were saying, Mr. Gwynne,’ he observed, therefore, ‘that the picture is quite delightful, quite striking, but that it has, if you will allow us to presume so far, one small fault—the face of that woman in drab now, don’t you think it just a little—just a little too——’

‘Disagreeable?’ promptly put in Winnifred.

‘I did not intend it to be so at first, but it has grown into that under my hands. I began it with one notion and have ended it with another.’

‘Changed your models, I presume,’ said Lady Clementina.

‘I never had a model for it really ; I drew upon my memory for my ideal, and that ideal changed strangely while I was at work on it.’

That Winnifred had been in his thoughts at the outset she plainly saw, although it seemed unnoticed by the others. A more than shadowy resemblance to herself was still apparent, but the likeness was not complimentary from the exaggeration of unpleasantness.

‘If you would have no objection, if you would not mind putting a new face——’

‘To an old friend ? Really, Mr. Cramersh, you must take the picture as you find it. I cannot alter any part without deranging the whole effect.’

‘I am afraid then—unless you can do this—I fear it will not quite——’

Mr. Crammersh floundered and beat about the bush terribly.

‘Mr. Christison said, I think, the figure was 1,500*l.*, a long price, certainly; but to that, provided, provided——’

‘Pardon me,’ said Dominic, rather brusquely, ‘this is a little premature. The picture is not for sale.’

‘Sold already?’ cried Crammersh, almost aghast.

‘It is not for sale,’ Dominic repeated, and in a tone that was not to be mistaken. Winifred interpreted it to mean that others might have the picture, but not Mr. Crammersh.

‘Dear me, dear me, this is very extraordinary,’ said the millionaire, ‘most extraordinary. You told me yourself long ago—I was given to understand distinctly——’

‘There was no promise made, at least, none to which I was a consenting party. But if you feel aggrieved, I shall be happy to give

you the refusal of my next, but this picture I shall not part with—at present.’

‘You are dissatisfied with it, perhaps?’ suggested Lady Clementina, as a way out of the difficulty.

‘On the contrary, I value it too much, on account of its associations; of the circumstances under which it was first conceived; long ago, when I had still some faith in the world and the actual perfection of one or two who were in it. But, I will not bore you with my reasons for wishing to retain it, only they are unalterable.’

‘How can you live if you refuse to sell your work?’ broke in the practical man of business.

Dominic laughed outright.

‘That’s my affair.’

Even Winnifred blushed at Mr. Crammersh’s indiscretion, and Lady Clementina looked distressed.

‘I had brought my cheque-book on purpose,’ went on the millionaire. ‘I’m really quite surprised, and all because we wished a face slightly altered.’

He was thinking for the moment of com-plaisant art swells who would have altered a moonlight scene if he wished it into a ship on fire, or the landing of Julius Cæsar into a school board election.

‘I’m afraid we’re wasting Mr. Gwynne’s valuable daylight,’ said Winnifred, stiffly. ‘Now that we have seen his picture, we had perhaps better be moving.’

She felt uncomfortable; a choking lump in her throat, a nearly irresistible and hysterical impulse first to laugh and the next moment to cry aloud. This meeting to which she had looked forward with no especial misgiving, had proved trying beyond measure. Throughout she had been on her guard, wound up to the last pitch, but the incidents of the interview had nearly overpowered her. First Dominic’s callous coldness, followed by his unmistakable contempt for her opinion, the evident dislike of her which alone she felt sure had prompted him to refuse the picture to Crammersh, and then his bitter incisive words, the cause of which she could not

explain. All these were so many smarting blows under which she nearly succumbed. Had anyone watched her very closely they would have detected, in the slightly heightened colour and the occasional nervous twitching of the hands, that she was passing through a painful ordeal. But no one noticed, and no one came to the rescue. By the time the usual commonplaces of bidding good-bye had been gone through by Lady Clementina and Mr. Crammersh, Winnifred had so far recovered herself as to bow quite naturally to Dominic, although she did not dare to meet his eyes.

He did not offer to shake hands with her as with the others, and Winnifred was hurt at the omission. Why should he despise and hate her now to this extent? What had been her crime? People called her capricious, wayward, never knowing her own mind; had not this one man to whom her heart had gone out in the old days been a thousand times more fickle in his treatment of her? But she would have liked to have taken his

hand if but for one second—no more. She gave a sigh involuntarily of relief the moment she was outside and beyond the studio, but she could bear no more of Mr. Crammersh that day.

‘Shall we go straight to Jackson and Graham’s,’ he asked obsequiously, ‘or to the city first?’

‘I must go home,’ Winnifred said, without apology.

‘But there are those cabinets and the carpets.’

‘Yes,’ added Lady Clementina, rather unhappy at this decision of Winnifred’s. Could it mean that the sight of the old lover had unsettled her by recalling too vividly what had passed between them? ‘Yes, they wanted an answer not later than to-day?’

‘They must wait till to-morrow, or longer. As to going shopping this morning, it’s quite out of the question. I have a headache, and I must go home.’

CHAPTER IX.

YEAR after year, when the month of February has drawn to a close, and March is already on the wing, there is tremendous bustle and excitement in the various quarters of London where art finds a home. From princely Kensington, with its new red brick colonies inhabited by the shining lights of the profession, to bourgeois Bloomsbury, tenanted by portrait painters and well-to-do tradesmen-like daubers of the old school ; from airy Hampstead, home of wood draughtsmen and the water-colour school, to clannish St. John's Wood, whose watchword is that of the Highlanders, ' Shoulder to shoulder ; ' upon the outskirts, in Clapham, Brixton, Finchley, or Shepherd's Bush, where gather chiefly the subalterns, still on their promotion—one watchword is on every lip, one aim and endeavour animates

every heart, one thought exclusively possesses every mind. The great and supreme moment is approaching for almost every painter who pretends to the name ; within a week or two will have arrived the all-important days for 'sending in.'

Cavil as we may at the Royal Academy, questioning, perhaps, whether it fulfils quite satisfactorily the functions with which the strange workings of our art institutions have invested it, there can be no doubt that, for the art world, Burlington House is a species of Mecca, to which all manner of men instinctively turn. They cannot, even if they would, shake off the trammels of a superstition which has grown with their growth, and has become, in truth, part and parcel of their art belief. Restive spirits continually chafe against its so-called tyranny : the boldest pretend to be positively indifferent, or launch out into loud-mouthed abuse ; but the most radical and discontented bow to the yoke, and submit, in spite of themselves, to the spell. The more mercenary, that numerous crowd moved

by self-interest, make open profession of faith. To them, 'the line' means hard cash; they have the highest aims, the loftiest aspirations; but they cannot live without bread, nor will they refuse butter, if it be anywhere within reach. To be represented well, ill, or not at all, at each year's exhibition, are three chances, upon which rest respectively—success, loss of reputation already earned, obscurity, perhaps failure, depreciation, and professional death.

Painters of all conditions, of every category and colour, duly impressed with the momentous character of the coming season, contemplate with mixed feelings the work by which they are now to be judged. Some are inflated with self-satisfaction; others, often the worthiest, are in a state of mental depression almost amounting to despair. Thus, Mr. Melladew, R.A.—a fat, substantial man of business, an art manufacturer more than a painter in the true sense of the word—thinks he never painted anything better in his life than his great historical work, the 'Fall of

Wolsey,' in which, with honest realism, the Cardinal is depicted actually tumbling down-stairs. The reign of Henry VIII. might be Mr. Melladew's private property ; he has drawn upon it, and upon nothing else, for his subjects, within the memory of the carpenters and the critics. The former have an unbounded admiration for Mr. Melladew, and consider his shiny, sticky canvases the perfection of painting. It is with them as with many more pretentious judges—mere execution and freedom of handling are deemed the greatest merit ; they would have preferred any smooth teatray or florid signboard to the strong, rugged work of real genius. The critics, on the other hand, where they are free to give vent to their own views, are not very friendly to Mr. Melladew. But the great man, like his pictures, is somewhat thick in the skin. So also is Stimperson, whose aim is to rival Michael Angelo, and to become in due course one of the old masters himself. He is academic to the finger-tips, and has reduced art, he says, to an exact science. He

paints scriptural subjects—nothing less ; but his ability is entirely disproportioned to his aims. This year it is ‘David defying the Giant Goliath ;’ last year it was ‘Absalom hanging by the Hair of his Head ;’ next it will be ‘Saul fighting the Amalekites.’ They are all alike these pictures—solemn expanses of dull colour, profoundly uninteresting, without one scrap of original thought, but the very highest art, of course. And Mr. Stimperson, secure in the approval of his own conscience, cares very little what anybody says about his work.

Not so humble-minded Smythe, the landscape painter, for whom both the before-mentioned have the liveliest contempt. Smythe is very miserable indeed ; he has succeeded admirably, but he is painfully alive to his own shortcomings. As he gazes at his bright, breezy, sunny effects, he remembers only too vividly the glorious splendour of nature herself. His colour is harmonious, his skies poetical, his waves liquid and really on the move ; but he is utterly dissatisfied with all he has done. By-and-by, when his

pictures are subjected to the severe ordeal of exhibition—where pictures, like human beings, suffer terribly from juxtaposition and the inevitable influence of their surroundings—his anguish will increase a thousand-fold ; the near neighbours of his ‘Break, break on thy cold grey Stones, oh Sea,’ will probably be Cardinal Wolsey, and the garish crimson of his flowing robes will draw all the tenderness out of his pearly skies, and make his apple-cheeked urchins as pale as consumptive ghosts.

Smythe will go home, and tell his wife that he means to buy a barrel-organ, and to give up painting for ever ; but he has more claim to be called a great and original painter than Melladew or Stimperson, although he is not ‘academic,’ and perhaps cannot ‘draw the figure’ to perfection.

Others there are equally anxious, with more cause, than Smythe—grey-headed men, like Christopher, who have shot their bolt and missed their mark. Their reputation now is somewhat on the wane : the dealers

no longer visit their studios, to sweep up all they can find ; prices are distinctly diminishing ; some day their work will find, perhaps, no market at all. Here is one with a troop of children and a sickly wife ; there another who has vowed himself since his youth to the support of his parents ; yet, again, a third, who, in the first heyday of sudden success, over-built himself, or speculated, or muddled away his money, with the common artistic failing of unbusiness-like inability to take care of one's own. Struggling young men, also, in feverish agitation, doubtful still of their powers, keenly sensitive to the failure of former years, in sickening apprehension lest they are to be doomed to be left out still longer in the cold ; or the once fashionable portrait painter, whose fickle patrons are deserting him for a newly-risen star ; or the unfortunate wretch who discovers at the eleventh hour that another and more distinguished artist has selected precisely the same subject as himself, and is certain to take the wind out of his sails.

The 'Zooks,' however, have come well to the front this year : the work that they exhibit will be by no means the worst on view. One or two pictures are notably first-rate. Thus the landscape of Stevens, who has again courted his death in painting it, is admirable—a winter scene, which is full of strange pathos ; dark wolds, with a leaden stream stealing beneath ; weird trees, waving their gaunt arms aloft into the cold, pitiless sky. Lubbock, the would-be Frenchman, has carried his imitativeness into his art. He has three charming Normandy landscapes—dappled skies, with reaches of cornfield and blue-bloused peasants ; the high-pointed roofs and square-towered church of a mediæval town rising above silvery-grey willows, which are shadowed in sluggish pools ; a long length of storm-tost waves, dashing in on a low level beach crowded with fisherfolk garnering the harvests of the sea. Bellew, an animal painter of promise, upon whom some day the mantle of Sir Edwin may fall, has thrown enough humour into his

subject—'Let Dogs delight'—to have made the fortune of half the comic papers in the town. Greatorex has a tremendous battle-piece—Salamanca—the famous charge of the heavy cavalry, 'tall men upon tall horses,' crashing down upon Thomières' infantry, and trampling them into the dust.

But the great masterpiece—of which one and all, with that strong spirit of *camaraderie* for which the Club is famed—are intensely proud, is the 'Lotos Eaters' of Dominic Gwynne. His last absence from London, protracted now nearly more than two years, had not erased him from the minds of his friends; but the picture, which had once been the subject of much talk, was in the interval nearly forgotten. Men remembered that he had been at work on something that promised extra well, but concluded he had dropped it, as great enterprises are abandoned often enough, and not only in the regions of art. Now it flashed upon them all as a sudden surprise—as a marvellous, unexpected success. The gossip of the studios carried

the news far and wide that Gwynne's picture would be the event of the year. It was full of fine qualities ; its colour, composition, sentiment, were unquestionable. Diligent labour and wide research were evidenced in the elaboration and absolute propriety of every detail.

Dominic, on Sundays, held a levée of his personal friends. They came and stood in front of his canvas in all manner of attitudes, making all manner of strange remarks. They stooped, and writhed, and twisted themselves about ; went close up to the picture, then walked slowly back ; they peered into a neighbouring mirror, to get it focussed ; they climbed up the top of the studio ladder, to examine the careful finish of the high prow which ran up into the sky. They criticised, in cant language but in perfect friendliness, the points that seemed open to question : they called this bit of colour 'raw,' and that 'ragged ;' they said that arm 'relieved too much,' and that leg was 'a trifle out ;' they declared this corner was 'hungry,' and that

‘rather to let.’ But the universal consensus of opinion was to the effect that it was a ‘tremendously fine thing.’

Dominic stood by and listened with keen relish, of course, but very doubtful himself how far his picture merited so much or such high-flown praise. He was, as we know, a modest and unassuming man, with a tendency towards self-depreciation. He was conscious of defects in his work; he knew, as only the creator can, how far the product of his brain fell short of the grand outlines of his first conception. He alone knew that he had not accomplished all at which he had aimed; he was in his heart dissatisfied, and this was perhaps a good sign. Genius is seldom quite contented with its own work; only smug mediocrity pats itself on the back, and contemplates with complacency its success.

Yet he loved his picture, and lingered over it to the last, adding each day here and there a touch with all the gentle, caressing handling of motherly affection. He could

hardly bring himself to part with it. He was weak enough to follow the van which conveyed it away right down into the yard at Burlington House ; and when it at length had disappeared within the great cavernous maw, he felt a pang such as the mother suffers at sending her firstborn into the hurly-burly of the great world.

What would be its fate ? Dominic was indeed more anxious about it than he cared to acknowledge even to himself. There was so much bound up with it—like the frail bark of old, it carried Cæsar and all his fortunes. It might be the first stepping-stone to a solid and enduring fame ; and fame he began to covet eagerly once more, from the moment he had again met with Winnifred Forsyth. If he could but rise now, rapidly in the world ! When he became known as a successful man, on the high road to be called a painter great and world-renowned—he might perhaps show her that he had not been utterly unworthy of her love ; thus best might he convince this faithless, frivolous woman

that he had been capable of winning her, as she had wished, if she had but taken him at his word.

Then followed gloomy forebodings. Perhaps it was all a mistake. His friends had been too kind—they were wrong ; only Winnifred, with her cold-hearted phrases and half-sneering compliments, was really in the right. The picture would be rejected. Why not ? Hangers were notoriously capricious. Year after year instances of injustice occurred—repeated cases where previous popular judgment had been reversed by the weight of an authority it was difficult to contest.

As the days slipped by, this mood rather grew upon Dominic ; it was fostered by the dark rumours which this year, as in every year, soon began to circulate around. There had been the most tremendous slaughter : an unprecedented number of pictures had been ‘sent in,’ and they had fallen in hundreds before the withering fire. A dead set had been made against certain styles ; landscape was having no chance. A majority of the

Hanging Committee loathed landscape, and classed it with photography, or drawing on the stones in the streets. Sea-pieces were highly unpopular; so was work purely decorative; work also that was not highly finished. Last of all, the poetical, sentimental, classical—which was the school to which the ‘Lotos Eaters’ belonged, if to any—was said to have made one R.A. positively sick; and it was nearly certain that even the best specimens, if admitted at all, would be ‘skied,’ or ‘floored,’ or hidden away with the rubbish in the smaller rooms.

They were not pleasant times these to enter the ‘Zooks,’ or to visit studios, and consort with the artist class. Some few might assume airs of jocular indifference, but the laugh was hysterical and slightly forced, and might easily at a word have degenerated into a howl of despair; others, less successful in hiding their feelings, went about with abject despair written in plain letters on every feature. Marwood might have been in pursuit of them with a halter, or their stockbroker with the news of

a further fall in Egyptians or Perus. When men met, they talked most eagerly upon commonplace, conventional topics—the price of humming-tops, the discomforts of the underground railway, the law of storms—but the one subject nearest at heart was most religiously tabooed. Half the painters would have asked which Academy was meant, if any reference was made to such a corporation—the Academy of Music, or that for young gentlemen on Brixton Hill? And yet with all the same idea was present, sleeping or waking, in dreams or in everyday life—‘Turned out,’ or ‘in ;’ ‘in,’ or ‘out’—if they could but be put out of their misery, and know the worst.

Nor was the excitement confined to the professional painters; it was felt by more than one amateur, many of whom, from various causes—vanity perhaps, it may be greed, or more often the excusable desire to submit their work to the test of a presumably strict and impartial ordeal—send in pictures to the Academy every year. The motives

were rather mixed which had impelled Winnifred Forsyth to become one of this number ; vanity, perhaps, preponderated, and with it worked a species of wounded pride. This recreant, Dominic Gwynne, had taunted her with indecision of character, with want of persistent constancy in pursuing what she undertook ; and she was eager to make him eat his words. She would prove, if possible, that her taste for art was in nowise extinguished because their friendship had ceased and he had thought fit to go off without a word. It was in this spirit that she took up that half-finished water-colour of the Pallanza period he had himself praised when she painted it on board the steamer bound to Locarno, the four Italian peasants seated on the gunwale of the boat. This she herself resolved to carry to the extreme limits of careful finish. She worked in secret, in the early mornings, before even Eggleton came to her room, and hiding the arrangement altogether from Lady Clementina ; equally without divulging a word, she had sent the drawing to the frame-maker's

when completed, with instructions to 'send it in,' and giving the shop as her address. Mr. Clipstone had orders to communicate the result without a moment's delay.

It came in the shape of a ticket of admission for varnishing day. The President of the Royal Academy invited W. Forsyth to inspect his work upon their walls on May 3, 187-, thus assuring Winnifred that full honours had crowned her modest venture. Would anyone dare to assert now that she could not draw or paint? Without advice or assistance, entirely by her own efforts, she had gained the *cachet* which, rightly or wrongly, is supposed to stamp an artist as up to the mark.

With a face something more cheerful than she usually wore in these days, she sailed into the breakfast-room, and was complimented by her father on her bright looks.

'I began to fear you meant to be ill,' he said, gloomily; 'ill, and this affair, of which I am heartily sick already, would have to be postponed.'

'Thank you, father; you know I am

never ill. I do not know which to admire most, your solicitude for your own comfort or your gratitude to me for my improved health.'

'You have had some good news, I presume?' said Lady Clementina. 'Mr. Crammersh is to return sooner than he expected?'

Business had called the great man down to Smokingham, and Lady Clementina concluded naturally that Winnifred was suffering with lover-like impatience from his absence.

'I am not aware when Mr. Crammersh returns,' Winnifred said, so coldly that it was easy to add the interpretation that she did not very much care.

'I said I would go with him to Tattersall's on Friday. You will want a second brougham horse, Winnifred. Please ask, when you write, when we may expect him.'

'I shall not have time to write to him to-day.'

'Certainly we shall be extra busy,' said Lady Clementina. 'Madame Elise's at twelve,

and then on to Mrs. Mason. Even now I do not see how half the *trousseau* can be ready in time.'

'I shall not be able to go to-day to those wretched milliners,' said Winnifred abruptly.

'But you have made the appointment—they will not like it.'

'It must keep—what matter?—there are lots of other milliners.'

'Why, what have you got to do?'

'Other things.' And just then Winnifred refused to be more communicative. She was in a good humour with herself, pleased at her success, had an excellent appetite in consequence, and wanted to eat her breakfast in peace.

But afterwards Lady Clementina came to her and said—

'Are you really in earnest? If so, I have at least a right to know why. What have you so important to do to-day that these other engagements are to be neglected?'

'I am going to the Royal Academy.'

'What a ridiculous idea! It does not

open for another week. Mr. Crammersh has promised us tickets for the private view, but that's not till Friday; this is only Monday. You must be making a mistake.'

'Not at all. I am going to-day—it's varnishing day.'

'Well, what of that?'

'I am an exhibitor.'

'What!'

Lady Clementina almost shrieked out this interrogation. It took her breath away almost. Jealousy, astonishment, not a little indignation had possession of her, and were plainly visible in her face.

'Really, Winnifred, you are a most extraordinary girl. I had every reason to suppose you had given up art. I know I have implored you again and again to practise it even a little, and now, without a word, I find you taking rank as a real artist.'

Winnifred said nothing.

'When and how did you do this picture? Is it your own doing really?'

'I'm not quite a cheat.'

‘What is the subject?’

‘Italian; those men on the steamboat.’

A spasm shot through Lady Clementina’s heart. Could it be that this sudden resumption of her old taste was in any way connected with their renewed acquaintance with Mr. Gwynne? That she should have selected an Italian subject, and a subject which Mr. Gwynne had praised, encouraged the suspicion. Winnifred would probably meet Mr. Gwynne if she went to the Academy, and awkward consequences might ensue. She must be prevented from going at all costs.

‘Of course it’s a great triumph,’ she said civilly. ‘I congratulate you thoroughly. But I beseech you to pause before you decide upon going to the Academy to-day. There can be no necessity for it.’

‘I may want to varnish.’

‘Is your picture an oil?’

Winnifred was too honest to evade the truth.

‘No, only a water-colour; but I might

like to alter : besides, it will be a great treat to see everything, and so soon. Before Mr. Crammersh, who makes such a fuss about his private-view tickets, and the privilege, and all that.'

'Mr. Crammersh would be very much annoyed if he knew you were going to-day.'

Winnifred looked as if she would snap her fingers at Mr. Crammersh.

'Winnifred, I implore you, I entreat you——'

Mere waste of words.

'I would forbid you positively, but you have never bent to my authority. I shall call in your father, and leave the matter in his hands.'

'You may call in fifty fathers ; they should not stop me, I declare. I am going—on that I am quite resolved.'

Lady Clementina could hardly trust herself to speak—rage was getting the better of her.

'Sometimes, Winnifred, I feel as if I should like to——'

‘Beat me ? you’d better try.’

‘It’s nothing but sheer obstinacy.’

‘Very likely ; but I mean to go.’

Lady Clementina got up and rang the bell. They were in her own private room.

‘Ask Colonel Forsyth,’ she said to the footman, “if he can come and speak a few words to me. Miss Forsyth and I wish for his advice.’

Winnifred’s face grew black, and her air betokened a dogged resistance ; but she did not say a word.

Presently her father arrived ; not in the best of humours, at being disturbed over the ‘Times’ and his morning cheroot.

‘It’s most annoying and inconvenient. Couldn’t you have said what you wanted at breakfast ? I was in the middle of most important letters.’

This was not quite the case. He meant to write them in the course of the morning, but they were not yet begun : one was about a retriever pup he had been promised, which had not arrived from Mr. Crammersh’s Scotch

keeper ; the other of complaint to the club committee, as to the quality of the quill pens in the writing-room.

‘Winnifred,’ began Lady Clementina, ‘has just announced her intention of going to the Academy to-day.’

‘Well,’ said Colonel Forsyth, ‘why not ? She enjoys that sort of thing, I suppose. I don’t. So long as you don’t ask me to look at pictures, I don’t care. Is that all you wanted me for ?’ he went on, with an indignant snort.

‘You scarcely understand, Ferdinand. The Academy is not really open yet.’

‘And still she wants to go ? Crammersh can manage it, I suppose ; I cannot, at any any rate. I wish you would leave me in peace.’

‘No, but this is only the artists’ day, when they go in to touch up their work. Winnifred, without consulting me, has sent a picture, which has been accepted, and now she wants to go and look at it.’

‘I see no harm.’

‘It’s the artists’ day, don’t you see?’ went on Lady Clementina, with emphasis sufficient, she thought, to explain to Colonel Forsyth how matters stood. But he was far too obtuse. Winnifred only was quick-witted enough to wonder why her stepmother harped so upon this one string.

‘They’re a rough lot, certainly,’ said Colonel Forsyth, who classed them probably with brick-burners and prize-fighters.

‘But they will know, I suppose, how to treat a lady ; and Sir Francis will be there.’

‘They’ll all be there—all the best of them,’ went on Lady Clementina, struggling hard not to commit herself, and becoming more and more involved and distressed.

‘Mr. Gwynne, no doubt,’ said Winnifred, very quietly, by way of a feeler.

The shot told. Colonel Forsyth started perceptibly, and could not recover himself all at once.

‘I hope that fine picture of his will be in a good place,’ went on Winnifred, with malicious spirit.

‘I thought you did not like it when you saw it,’ Lady Clementina could not help saying, in spite of herself ; and Colonel Forsyth was down on her directly.

‘You have been to that fellow’s studio ? How was it ? When was it ? Who took you there ?’

‘Mr. Crammersh took us there,’ said Winnifred, growing more and more convinced, from her father’s manner in speaking of Dominic Gwynne, that there was some mystery which remained to be solved. This notion was strengthened by Colonel Forsyth’s sudden change of tone about the visit to the Academy.

‘I quite agree with Clementina. It would be utterly wrong for you to go. Let this be final. I object altogether, and you must give it up. Understand that, once for all.’

‘I shall understand nothing of the kind, father. Pray remember that I am no longer a child, to be whipped and sent off to bed. I should be sorry to vex you seriously ; but do not be so utterly unreasonable.’

‘Can you persist, Winnifred, in opposing your father, after what he has said?’ cried Lady Clementina.

‘You must not; you shall not go,’ her father added, so that there might not be the slightest ambiguity in his meaning.

‘I am equally resolved,’ Winnifred replied firmly.

‘I trust you will not oblige us to take other steps to prevent your going,’ said her father, hotly.

‘You scarcely mean to threaten me with force? Nonsense, you would not dare to do anything of the kind.’ Winnifred’s eyes flashed fire.

‘When young ladies forget what is due to themselves, it is incumbent upon their nearest relatives to interpose,’ began Lady Clementina.

‘I am going to my room to dress,’ said Winnifred, putting an end to the discussion. She was so nearly emancipated from the restrictions of young ladyhood, that she felt she might discount a little of the inde-

pendence of the married woman. 'You need not order the brougham ; Mr. Crammersh's coachman ought to be here, and I shall have the victoria, or perhaps I shall walk.'

And with that she stalked out of the room, leaving her father and Lady Clementina to understand that she dared them to do their worst.

They were not brave people ; they were conscious, moreover, that she had passed now nearly beyond their control. Within a few short weeks she would be mistress of a town house, a country house, a shooting lodge, and a cottage by the sea. Yet more, she would have the uncontrolled disposal of a munificent jointure, and, behind all, a husband worth at least fifty thousand a year. They were matter-of-fact people not unmindful of the glories of worldly possessions, and they knew that Winnifred could not now be coerced as if she were still in the school-room or only just out.

When Winnifred came down followed by

the faithful Eggleton, she found the victoria at the door, and no further objections to her headstrong resolve.

She was on the point of stepping into the carriage when a strange repugnance came over her against using Mr. Crammersh's property upon the errand on which she was bound. No ; she preferred to walk to Burlington House, it savoured of snobbishness to drive up in a well-appointed equipage when so many worthier people went afoot ; this was the first and most obvious reason, but far down in her heart was another which boded ill for the peace of mind of the man whose wife she had promised to be. She could not exactly admit that, if she got the opportunity, she would speak to Dominic Gwynne, but she meant to let him, if he felt so disposed, speak to her. His conduct had been strange, unaccountably strange, no doubt ; at least it had seemed so. But was he himself altogether to blame ? Had he had quite fair play ? It was evident that there had been some communication between him and her

parents? But what? What if they had taken upon themselves to dismiss him without consulting her? These thoughts perplexed and agitated her as she walked briskly down Bond Street and into Piccadilly. By the time she entered the porch of the Royal Academy she was far from happy in her mind. Then on presenting her ticket at the turnstile she found herself observed by many pairs of admiring eyes—the artistic eye always appreciates true beauty, and her nervousness was greatly increased; she clung with despairing eagerness to her maid, and found next that she and Eggleton must part. The Academy recognised no necessity for *chaperons*; ladies who wished their maids to accompany them past the barrier must select maids who could draw well enough to exhibit. Now Winnifred really hesitated. That saucy self-reliance which she had exhibited in Brook Street deserted her entirely. For a moment she was half inclined to turn back, but it needed more courage to retire than to advance. Nor could she have submitted to

the ignominy of acknowledging to Lady Clementina that the enterprise had been too much for her. So she bade Eggleton wait for her; there were seats, or she might amuse herself by taking a walk, returning within an hour; and having thus dismissed her maid, Winnifred, with the feeling of a Cortez who has burnt his ships, pressed forward with a crowd of others, up the grand staircase and into that outer vestibule from which all the other galleries open.

But after the first plunge no one appeared to take much notice of her. People came there on business, and not to gape about them. Nearly all carried colour-boxes, well worn generally and unmistakable, and had mahl-sticks under their arms. They were evidently anxious to commence work. Friends as they passed exchanged short salutations, such as 'Glad to see you!' which meant much more upon this occasion than the mere words implied, or 'Where are you?' a query to which came cabalistic incomprehensible replies: 'I don't know,' which would have

sounded odd ; or ' In the sky,' which would have seemed more odd still ; or ' Out of sight,' which would have been clearly untrue, had it not been understood that the reference was to a picture and not to the individual himself.

Winnifred's shyness wore gradually off in the novelty and amusement of the scene. She now mustered up courage and entered the first room. It was full of pictures of course, but they were not seen to the best advantage. In front of some great stages had been erected, and men were on them with big brushes as if they were white-washing ; several frames were empty, in others the pictures were wrapped in linen sheets. Here and there tall ladders were leant against the wall, and men stood on their topmost rungs, apparently engaged on bidding a last farewell to their work, which till the exhibition closed they would never see again except with opera-glasses, or by looking through the skylights from the roof. A number of carpenters in the conventional paper caps were hurrying to

and fro, moving stages, helping to take down pictures or put them up again, drawing nice distinctions in the deference they accorded to the different artists, based upon their known prestige or the position of their works upon the walls.

There were as much variety among the men as in the pictures on view. Not a few were well dressed, in clothes neat and quiet; often fashionably cut; in these days artists, especially the young and thriving, have discarded the old superstition that slovenliness and long hair are external marks of transcendent genius, and attire themselves much as do other gentlemen up and down the London world. But there were some ragged reckless spirits too, who brought with them memories of the beloved Bohemia in which they dwelt, amidst clay pipes and pewter pots, and in well-worn dilapidated coats, heartily despised their brethren for submitting to the conventionalities of life. Between two of these Winnifred heard the following colloquy, one, who stood below, speaking to another, who,

sponge in hand, was in the act of squeezing it out on the surface of his picture.

‘What, Snaggs ! do you wash ?’

‘Looks like it, don’t it ?’ replied the other. Although it looked nothing of the kind ; a dirtier gentleman never took vows against soap.

Now and again, with an air of conscious importance, came sailing by magnates of the art world ; R.A.’s upon their own ground, at home in their own house, sometimes in groups, sometimes singly. A few, with the liberalmindedness of talent, spoke respectfully of promising work. They could afford to praise, being strong in the knowledge of their own power ; others, less secure upon the throne to which the good luck of scant competition in past times had raised them, protected themselves as they thought by supercilious criticism, now covertly hostile, now affable and condescending, but with an assumption of patronage that was not always gratefully received. Then Mr. Melladew, who had been a hanger, thought himself

bound to pat his young friends on the back, with neat phrases, such as, 'Jones, you'll do yet;' and, 'Smith, give up that lemon-yellow;' or, 'Brown, I think you are advancing; slow and sure; remember your drawing; don't try to run before you can walk;' after which kindly encouragement he passed on, followed by remarks not exactly of gratitude: 'Thinks he can paint, the old muff'—Winnifred overheard one irreverent youngster, with scorn in his tones. 'When he can do anything like Nick Gwynne, I give him leave to talk.'

Winnifred pricked up her ears.

'It is grand; the finest thing here out and out. Have you seen it?'

'Not yet; where is it?'

'In the Lecture-room; stuck away. On the line of course, but it ought to be in the Hall.'

Winnifred longed to ask which was the Lecture-room, not that she wished to go there, of course not; now that she was within a stone's throw of him all her desire to have a short talk with him had gone off. Not for worlds would she admit even to herself that

she was anxious to see this great work of art again, still less to meet Mr. Gwynne. So she wandered on mechanically from room to room with a strong returning spasm of shyness, as it seemed that she, and she alone, was without a friend to throw her a word. The sense of loneliness increased on her, and with it came a feeling that she was no longer unobserved, which added greatly to her discomfort. Some one was following her. It was a vague sort of uncomfortable feeling; but she was sure of it. A strange magnetism, or whatever it may be, told her this, although she had never caught sight of the individual. So strongly did the idea take possession of her, that once or twice she nearly broke into a panic. It was difficult to resist a desire to run, a desire known to all hunted animals when pursuers are out and danger is afoot. At first she did quicken her pace, and walked on more rapidly; then it seemed ridiculous. What was there to be afraid of? and the idea of racing through an exhibition of pictures was ludicrous in the

extreme. She sat down, got up again, and moved on ; again sat down, rose, joined in with a group of spectators, once more moved forward, and yet for ever this mysterious feeling oppressed her that she was being watched and followed. At last she was on the point of making for the doors and leaving the place, when she turned suddenly and abruptly, and found herself face to face with Dominic Gwynne.

It was impossible for her to repress a little cry of relief : this was the last person she wished to meet perhaps, but yet here was some one who knew her.

Dominic himself was not insensible to the warmth of her greeting. But he spoke as if in the utmost astonishment.

‘ Miss Forsyth ! I thought it must be you. I confess I have followed you for some time ; but how in the name of goodness did you get in here ? ’

‘ Mr. Gwynne ! pray how did you ? ’ she replied with much of her old sauciness.

‘ By being an exhibitor. But you ? ’

‘May I not enjoy the same right, if I earn it?’

‘You have a picture here? Impossible! What induced you to send?’

‘Why did you say that my art tastes had evaporated?’

‘Did I say that?’

‘And that that——’ he had called her ‘inconstant?’

‘Why did you send me such an answer?’ went on Dominic.

‘An answer? to what?’ Winnifred seemed bewildered for a moment, then remembering what had passed at home that morning, she flushed crimson, and began to divine that there had been some false play.

‘Dominic,’ she said outright, as she offered him her hand, and looked straight into his eyes, ‘Dominic, some one has made mischief between us. Tell me the exact truth.’

With a heart beating in wild pulsation of newly nascent hope, Dominic led Winnifred

to the sofa which runs the length of the Sculpture-gallery, and which to-day was nearly deserted.

‘ You remember Smokingham ? ’

Winnifred nodded.

‘ I wrote next day to your father to propose, and got a reply in black and white. I have the letter ; that it was all a mistake, that you liked me as a friend—nothing more.’

‘ Who wrote that ? ’ cried Winnifred, burning with extreme wrath.

‘ Lady Clementina I think, but it was in the third person. You shall see the letter, I carry it always in my pocket-book. Here it is, read it.’

‘ The mean creatures, the deceitful, double-faced, perfidious wretches ! I can never, never forgive them. But you—you believed this terrible lie ? Oh ! Dominic, I thought you could have trusted me better than that.’

‘ I ought, certainly ; but the language was so precise ; and then, you know, it was not the first time you had disappointed me.’

‘ Dominic, please let bygones be bygones,’

Winnifred whispered with a soft pleading voice, so unlike her usual self that it was plain she was in a melting mood.

Was it strange that he took her hand then and there, and, safe in the shelter of a group of Greek warriors and a colossal statue of the Prince Consort, first covered it with rapturous kisses, or that he then held it in both his, while he drank in deep draughts of his new-found happiness from the glory of her splendid half-tearful eyes?

CHAPTER X.

NEITHER spoke now for some time. Their hearts were too full. Dominic, overflowing with joyous satisfaction at the recovery of a lost ideal; Winnifred, with many emotions changing in rapid succession. First a fulness of happy contentment, next a spasm of foreboding at the difficulties that lay ahead, then all disappeared in nearly over-mastering indignation at the affront her people had put upon her by answering falsely and in her name. 'That they should have dared to do it! It makes me furious,' she cried again and again.

Then she sprang from her seat.

'Where now?' asked Dominic, with a smile at her impetuosity.

'Home. I shall not be happy till I have had it out with them. They shall know that

I am not a perfect simpleton to be tricked and trifled with as they please.'

'Do sit down again—only for a moment, and tell me when shall I see you again,' asked Dominic with some mournfulness in tone and aspect. The immediate present was so blissful that he could not bear to let it go.

'To-morrow, if you care to.'—Winnifred looked down. This man might be her future husband if he pleased, and when he pleased, but he had not renewed his offer specifically.

'I will go to Brook Street to-morrow, and demand you in due form.'

'Yes,' cried Winnifred, with a bright look of approval. 'That will be best—there are difficulties, unpleasantnesses, to be gone through, for me chiefly, and I should like to be open and above-board. Come to-morrow and ask for me at a certain hour, and I can then make sure you are admitted to the house—you have the courage to come?'

Dominic laughed.

'There is nothing very appalling in the prospect.'

‘ But you will be very badly received ; there will be a tremendous fight ; my father will probably insult you, and my stepmother will do worse if she can.’

‘ Are we not strong enough, if united, to face the whole world ?’

‘ And they will have another ally, one who has a fair claim to take me to task—Mr. Crammersh ; but the blame is theirs rather than mine.’

This was the first mention of the poor *fiancé’s* name, and it jarred upon Dominic rather.

‘ You had heard—you were aware—’ Winnifred faltered, rather uncomfortable and unhappy.

‘ They told me, soon after my return. Then when you came to my studio together, I drew my own conclusions.’

‘ Oh ! Dominic,’ Winnifred said, flushing a vivid crimson, ‘ I have hated myself ever since I said yes. But I had some excuse. You had gone, without a word.’ A cunning way of securing Dominic’s good will. ‘ I

was reckless, miserable, and my people never left me alone. I was not particularly happy at Brook Street, and I thought if I had a settled home of my own, I should at least be independent.'

'And this man, you liked him?' said Dominic, made blunt and downright by the jealousy a lover feels when another seems to have been favoured ever so little.

Winnifred again hung her head—'Liked him,' she said in a low voice—'Well, it was a more negative form; I did not dislike him—that's all I can say.'

'And now?' went on Dominic, still pressing her hand.

'How can you ask?' she cried, jubilant, and without a shadow of remorse.

'You will withdraw from your engagement?' Dominic asked, wishing for explicit statement, and not disinclined to let Winnifred justify herself for this somewhat unpleasant proceeding.

'Most certainly—it's not binding upon me. I consider it had its origin in fraud;'

but for the dishonesty and deceitfulness of my own belongings Mr. Crammersh would never have paid me attention ; the blame rests rather with them than with me.'

'And you fully realise all you mean to give up ?' Dominic went on, a little doubtful still of his immense good luck.

'I gain more than I give up, Dominic,' she said, simply, but in an impressive way, which went far to convince him that in truth he had gone near to gain her heart.

'God bless you, Winnifred. It shall be through no fault of mine that you live to regret your choice ; I feel strong enough now to conquer all the world, for you.'

Winnifred, in answer, gave him her hand ; but their eyes met, and interchanged vows more eloquent than the most impassioned language could have conveyed. They were still seated there, hand locked in hand, utterly unconscious that they were in a public place where such harmless philandering would certainly be spied out by amused passers-by, when the utterance of Dominic's

name by some one who stood over them, roused them both with a sudden start.

‘I’ve been hunting for you high and low, Dominic,’ said the new comer, and then he paused abruptly. He began to feel, perhaps, that it would have been kinder to have continued his hunt than have broken in on so charming a *tête-à-tête*. Winnifred’s face he could not clearly make out; she sat under the window with her back to the strong light, but that she was an attractive young person, dressed in perfect taste, and evidently on the most friendly terms with Dominic Gwynne, were facts that such an experienced veteran as Guy Greatorrex took in at a glance.

‘Well, I wasn’t difficult to find,’ Dominic replied, rather grumpily. ‘I’ve been about the place all the morning; what do you want with me?’

‘Are you in a position to remember what brought you here? Do you think this an evening party or the Garden of Eden? When will you descend from the clouds, you miserable dreamer, and cease to be an ass?’

Old Greatorex was getting cross.

‘Nice language, old Guy, and before ladies, too! What has raised your ire?’

‘It’s quite inexcusable, I tell you——’

‘Pardon me, you’ve told me nothing yet.’

‘Well, I tell you now that this is varnishing day, and that your picture wants a lot done to it still. You must not, you shall not, waste your time any longer. There’s Mella-dew, and there’s Stimperson, and two or three more; they’ve been picking it to pieces already. I told you that they’d fall foul of that bit of crude colour in the left-hand corner, which I see you’ve never touched although you promised me you would. The day is getting on, but you have done nothing.’

‘Haven’t I?’ asked Dominic, with an amused smile, as he glanced at Winnifred.

But she, having listened a little abashed and shamefaced to Mr. Greatorex, wondering whether he recognised her, now jumped up and said briskly, ‘Oh! Dominic, this will never do; let us go to the picture at once.’

‘Miss Forsyth!’ cried Guy, who knew her directly he saw her face in the light—‘Miss Forsyth! You here? What does this mean, Dominic?’

‘It means that she is an accomplished artist, as you are; it means also——’

But Winnifred put her hand on his arm as if to implore him to keep silent.

‘The two people I most esteem in the world,’ he went on, leaving the explanation to be taken as said, ‘should know each other. Winnifred, this is Mr. Greatorrex, my first patron, my oldest and staunchest friend. Dear old Guy, I need not introduce Miss Forsyth; you have known her by name for some time.’

‘Yes,’ said Greatorrex, with a grave bow, ‘of Miss Forsyth I have often heard; nor is this, I think, the first time that we have met.’

Winnifred felt unhappy. His cold, measured tones implied distrust, yet more dislike. The sweet but agitating scene through which she had just passed had unnerved her,

and she blushed consciously, having at the moment no single word to say in her own defence.

‘We met, I think,’—he began again; but Dominic, who had watched her closely, interpreted her confusion as shyness, and came chivalrously to the rescue.

‘No matter where: you meet now on common ground—Miss Forsyth is a sister of the brush—let us go and see her work. Where have they hung you, Winnifred?’

‘I scarcely know—I’ve not had time to look for it.’

‘Exhibitors generally make strict search for their own productions directly they arrive,’ Greatorrex said, almost casting doubt upon her statements. ‘But perhaps you’ve only just come in, Miss Forsyth?’

‘Not exactly—I came about an hour ago.’ Stupid old man, could he not understand that she had been better employed?

‘Come then,’ said Dominic; ‘we’ll commence the hunt.’

‘Oh! no, you must go and work, Dominic.

Mr. Greatorex shall escort me ; that is, if he does not object.'

'Not at all,' said the old man, but quite making a favour of it ; and the two walked off together.

After some dozen paces Winnifred stopped short, and, looking straight at her companion, said suddenly,—

'Are you friend or foe ?'

Greatorex was a little taken aback.

'To whom ?'

'To me. But you need not answer ; I know you dislike me, detest me ; I can see it in your face. Why is it ? What have I done to you ? You have never spoken six words to me in your life.'

'Miss Forsyth, Dominic Gwynne is a man in whom I take the liveliest interest ; I have long had his welfare at heart. He has, in return, concealed nothing from me. I have known his thoughts for some years past—his hopes, aspirations, his disappointments. Need I say more ?'

And you associate me with the latter ?'

‘Can you deny that you have trifled with his happiness, that you raised false hopes, lured him on, then dashed them unexpectedly and ruthlessly to the ground?’

‘All this I do deny, most distinctly and unhesitatingly.’

Greatorex looked at her with some surprise and waited to hear more; but Winifred scorned to justify herself; what did she care about this disagreeable old creature? She had regained her composure and her courage; she would throw down the gauntlet, he could not hurt her, she could do without his good word. Dominic and she were once more united and at peace, they need fear no mischief-makers to mar or interrupt their new and perfect understanding.

And without another word she left him to rejoin Dominic, whom she found at length in front of his canvas.

‘I think I should like to go home at once,’ she said in rather a faint voice, and Dominic, looking at her, found her eyes were tearful and her face rather white.

‘What has happened? Have you had words with old Guy?’

‘He is an old Guy. I don’t want to speak to him again.’

‘Has he been rude? He does not mean it; he is the best old fellow at heart, but a little rough on the surface—that’s all. Tell me, what did he say?’

‘Not now; by-and-by; it will keep; I could not enter into a long talk now. I must be alone. So much has happened, so much has still to be done, that I must be alone. Good-bye, Dominic.’ She put out her hand.

‘You’ve not looked at the picture.’

‘I saw it in the studio; I hate it. It reminds me of what I wish to forget. Will you change that figure again, now?’

‘If I can persuade you to sit to me some day.’

‘I shall not want much persuasion, Nick Gwynne.’ She laughed at his look of surprise. ‘I know your name, you see. And now good-bye. You will come to-morrow at

eleven, exactly ? and let me have that odious letter ; I shall want it.'

Then they parted, Dominic returning to his work with elated looks, which he could not altogether conceal, while Winnifred ran down the grand staircase, and presently came across her maid, patient, uncomplaining Eggleton, half asleep upon a bench in the vestibule.

'You poor soul!' Winnifred said, with some compunction. 'I had actually forgotten your existence. Have you been here ever since ?'

'Oh! no, mem. I went to Brook Street to dinner, but I've been back some time ; and if you please, mem, I was to tell you——'

She got up with the air of an usher conveying a royal message from the Queen to her faithful Commons.

'I was to tell you, mem—my lady desired me to tell you—that Mr. Crammersh called soon after you left——'

Winnifred started a little in spite of herself.

‘And he was to come again for lunch, and my lady hoped you would be back.’

Winnifred looked at her watch ; it was already past three ! How the time had flown ! Nearly four hours since she had left Brook Street, and it seemed but five minutes —no more.

Then she summoned a hansom, got in with Eggleton, and was driven back to her father’s house.

Lady Clementina met Winnifred almost upon the doorstep.

‘You have heard,’ she said at once ; ‘but come in here,’ and her ladyship led the way into Colonel Forsyth’s sanctum, a small room just off the hall, where he smoked and snoozed and made a pretence of doing business for about one minute a day. This place was the handiest, and Lady Clementina was in a hurry to have her say.

Winnifred was equally eager to meet her stepmother. They were like opposing armies, ready to join issue, without preliminary feints and skirmishing, but by opening fire and be-

coming sharply engaged at once along the whole line.

‘You have heard that Mr. Crammersh has been here to-day—twice?’

‘Well, what of it?’ Winnifred replied with the utmost *sangfroid*. ‘What did he say?’

‘He was more than vexed; I don’t think I have seen him so put out before.’

‘I’m glad to hear it,’ said Winnifred. There must be a rupture between them, and she was pleased to think that the quarrel would be begun by him.

‘I thought he was safe at Smokingham, but he had come up unexpectedly. He came here of course directly, and was more than surprised to hear you had gone out.’

‘Why should he be surprised at that?’

‘Considering the circumstances under which you went out—and in his carriage, moreover.’

‘Pardon me, I walked. Let there be no mistake about that; and these circumstances?’

Pray, how was he aware of them? Perhaps you detailed them to him in full?’

‘I could do no less. He asked me point blank. Would you have had me prevaricate or tell a falsehood outright?’

‘Lady Clementina,’ cried Winnifred, with the flushed cheeks of one who is speaking an unpleasant home truth, ‘the less you say about telling falsehoods the better.’

‘Winnifred, how dare you? How dare you use such insulting language to me? I will not put up with it. You shall apologise. I will speak to your father.’

‘I am quite ready to answer for my words,’ Winnifred said quietly. ‘But that will keep. Go on, please, about Mr. Crammersh.’

Lady Clementina was becoming nervous. She had inward misgivings that something serious was about to happen. Could Winnifred be referring to what had passed with this odious Mr. Gwynne? She was half tempted to enquire cautiously, but then it seemed more judicious and discreet to ignore Winnifred’s language, at least for the present.

‘Why should Mr. Crammersh be so much surprised? He ought to have been pleased at my success at the Academy?’

‘It was your persistence in going alone; the misconception that might be put on such conduct; that a young lady, who would soon bear his name, should so far have forgotten herself——’

‘These notions never came into his head spontaneously. They must have been supplied to him. By you, I suppose? If so, I am much obliged to you.’

Lady Clementina thought Winnifred was speaking ironically, and hastened to justify herself.

‘It was right that he should know. I should have been failing in my duty if I had kept him in ignorance.’

‘I am much obliged to you, I repeat; it was the kindest thing you could have done.’

‘Do you mean that you do not care? This air of bravado is all very well, but I assure you you will not find it easy to make your peace with him.’

‘Suppose I do not wish to make my peace with him?’ Winnifred said coolly.

‘Are you speaking seriously?’

‘Perhaps.’

‘You are making mountains out of mole-hills,’ Lady Clementina said, now seriously alarmed, and eager to explain things away. ‘He was vexed, perhaps naturally—well, not naturally, if you object to the word; and he showed his temper too openly; but he is of a forgiving disposition, as you know, and I’m sure, if you will only explain, there will be an end of the matter.’

‘I will not eat humble pie, to oblige you, or him, or anyone in the word. I see no harm in what I did, and would do it again. I shall not make the first advance, you may rest assured of that; on the contrary, if he does make his submission, I doubt much whether I would accept his apologies.’

‘You cannot mean that you would quarrel with him?’

She nodded.

‘To break with him, now at the eleventh

hour! Oh! Winnifred, you make my blood run cold. Now at the eleventh hour! It would be too outrageous, too wicked, too despicable. But you cannot be in earnest.'

'Why not?'

Lady Clementina's uneasiness was growing fast into absolute terror. 'You cannot go back from your word at the last moment. Your father would never allow it.'

Winnifred laughed a little scornful laugh. 'It's not my father's affair; I am the person most nearly concerned, and I shall do as I please. Mr. Crammersh, for reasons best known to himself, chooses to take offence at something I have done. Very good; the remedy lies in his own hands; he can go about his business.'

This rapid development of the small cloud of first misunderstanding into a black storm which threatened positive rupture, plainly indicated that Winnifred had come under new influences. She would not otherwise have been so eager to pick a quarrel with the man to whom she was engaged.

Lady Clementina, although not supernaturally sharp-witted, understood this, and it made her the more miserable, attributing it to its proper cause—renewed acquaintance, and an interchange of sentiments, with Dominic Gwynne. She grew more and more alarmed, and scarcely knew what to do or say next ; but to deprecate hastiness, and so gain time, seemed, on the spur of the moment, the safest and only course to pursue.

‘Winnifred, let me beg and entreat of you—I would do so on my knees almost—to pause ; to do nothing rashly ; be guided by our advice. You can trust us, you can indeed.’

This was hardly the best method of mollifying Winnifred ; what their perfidious treatment had cost her already was just then too strongly evident.

‘I cannot trust you,’ she replied, so bluntly as to be absolutely rude.

‘You wrong us, you do indeed. We have no thought—your father has none, nor indeed have I any thought,—but for your

welfare. We have been guided by that invariably in all we have done for you.'

'Excuse me, I entirely disagree with you. I happen to have now abundant and unmistakable proof of the value of this kindness of which you make so much parade. It may have been well meant; I will not deny your good intentions; but I cannot congratulate you upon the means you have employed.' This could mean nothing less than that she knew all that had happened, yet Lady Clementina could not forbear asking her what she meant.

'If you want plain English, you shall have it. I have found you out; I know how shamefully you deceived me. You asked me how I dared accuse you of falsehood; I will withdraw and apologise when you explain to me how you dared write this letter in which you so freely use my name.'

'What letter? May I read it? I never heard of it——'

'You had better be careful, Lady Clementina. Do not attempt to justify yourself;

you will only get deeper and deeper into the mire. But I think you must admit that I have good and sufficient cause to complain of the treatment I have received.'

'We acted for the best—we did indeed,' cried Lady Clementina, much distressed and wringing her hands.

'Of that others must judge.'

'Oh! Winnifred, you must not let this go beyond ourselves; it is a family secret.'

'Mr. Crammersh must know exactly what has passed: that is imperative; in no other way could I justify myself for the course I mean to take. He might blame me, and that I do not deserve; but for your deceitful conduct, matters would have been very different; yours is the blame of it all, and you must take all the consequences.'

'What are those consequences? At least I may ask that.'

'You shall know in good time, if you cannot guess them already;' and with that Winnifred, who had been standing throughout this scene, walked slowly out of the room,

leaving Lady Clementina nearly prostrate at the new and unexpected contingencies which were now made probable.

What would Winnifred do next? Was she in earnest in her determination to jilt Mr. Crammersh? In the first burst of enthusiasm and exaltation of spirit, she might declare that nothing should induce her to marry him; but would she have the nerve to persist? Still more, could she bring herself to resign all the splendours which the match held out to her? Lady Clementina thought and pondered over it all, but without arriving at any settled conclusion. She was, in truth, so nearly paralysed by the shock that her brain refused to act, and she remained there in the wide arm-chair, which was Colonel Forsyth's favourite, while the hours slipped by, and the day gradually drew to an end.

Her husband, who found her there when he came in from the club, was not a little surprised. He liked to keep his room to himself, and none of his womankind entered it except on invitation.

‘Clementina!’ he said. ‘You here!’

‘Oh! something dreadful has happened, Ferdinand, since I saw you last,’ began Lady Clementina, without any apology.

‘So I should suppose from your scared face. Well, let me know the worst quickly.’

‘Winnifred’—of course it was Winnifred; it always was Winnifred, and had been for some years.

‘What, in the name of fortune, has overtaken the girl now? Does she refuse to be vaccinated, or does she want a slice of the moon? Thank heaven, she’ll soon be off our hands. Mr. Crammersh——’

‘That’s just where it is. She has just intimated to me, in plain terms, that she has no intention of marrying Mr. Crammersh at all.’

‘Not mar——’ Colonel Forsyth could not end the word, his jaw dropped, all power of speech was temporarily suspended by the shock. But he recovered, and said, with rather a strong expression—

‘But she must and shall; it is too late to

withdraw. What is the meaning of this sudden craze ?'

'It was as I feared. At the Academy she met this disreputable lover of hers, heard the truth of the letter we wrote, then returned in a furious passion, which she visited on me.'

'Had she the audacity to propose to back out of her engagement ?'

'Nothing less ; and in the most distinct terms.'

Colonel Forsyth went to the bell.

'Beg Miss Forsyth to be good enough to come down and speak to us.'

While the servant was absent Colonel Forsyth ranged up and down the small room, like the panther at the Zoo when kept waiting for its food.

Eggleton reappeared.

'Miss Winnifred, sir, is dressing for dinner. She will join you in half an hour.'

'Go back and say this is urgent. I wish to speak to her—I—her father, say ——'

As if Eggleton could be mistaken as to who Colonel Forsyth was !

But Winnifred was not to be hurried, and some time still elapsed before she came down. She was dressed plainly, most plainly, but with scrupulous care. Everything about her was neat and in perfect order, harmonising well with the absolute quiescence and composure of her manner.

‘Yes, father?’

‘I cannot believe what I hear. Is it true?’

‘That depends upon where you have heard it. Half you hear at the club is untrue I have no doubt in the world.’

‘I beg you will not seek to evade my question by mere frivolity. I must insist upon a straightforward, direct, and categorical reply. Am I to understand that you have entertained the preposterous notion of withdrawing from your solemn engagement with Mr. Crammersh?’

‘I have. More—I am resolved to do so.’

Her coolness was inimitable.

‘Then I shall not permit it. Understand me, I shall not permit it. Never. Not for

one single second. What would be said of you, of us—by Mr. Crammersh, by all the world ?’

‘ Very hard things I daresay, but of you principally, when the real truth is known.’

The colonel’s face fell. He knew right well how mean was the part he and his wife had played.

‘ And what Mr. Crammersh will say, you will very soon be able to judge for yourself. I expect him here every instant.’

‘ Here ? Has he been asked to dine ? I did not know. Did you ask him, Clementina ?’

‘ *I* asked him to come, father. Not to dine, but to hear from my own lips what I had already conveyed in my letter—my distinct intimation that all must be at an end between us.’

‘ It’s really quite too awful !’ Lady Clementina interjected, with a heartrending sigh.

‘ It shall not be permitted, I swear !’ cried Colonel Forsyth, whose indignation took the form of violent wrath.

‘Don’t swear, father ; and keep calm, if you can. Remember you have brought this entirely upon yourselves. Your sins have found you out. But for your duplicity at Burcham Paddox I should have been Mr. Gwynne’s wife before this.’

‘You shall never be his wife, now,’ Colonel Forsyth said between his teeth.

Winnifred smiled.

And next moment Mr. Crammersh was announced.

They went, all three, with varying emotions, to the drawing-room to receive him. Winnifred was the first to speak.

‘I felt it was due to you, Mr. Crammersh, to give you an opportunity of protesting against the shameful treatment to which you have been subjected——’

‘You admit, then, that it is shameful, Miss Forsyth?’

Mr. Crammersh’s manner was that of a man who had been grossly insulted, and who intended to make his protest heard.

‘I do ; and I am deeply grieved that

circumstances should have required it. But although I do not shrink from the strong reprehension I know I deserve, I must again tell you that the blame is not entirely mine. My letter will have explained what occurred last year——'

'Surely, Winnifred, you were not so indiscreet as to divulge family secrets?' said her father, hotly.

'I fail to see why I should screen even my own father, when he does a mean and contemptible act. But that is beside the question. Mr. Crammersh, I offer you, humbly from the bottom of my heart, my most earnest apologies for this outrage; but it is quite impossible, utterly and definitely impossible, that I should ever become your wife.'

'It's too disgraceful,' Crammersh burst out. His fury, long pent up, was almost too much for him, and his words fell far short of what he really felt. 'It's too disgraceful. It's disreputable. It's a breach of contract. I'll bring an action. I'm thousands and thousands out of pocket. You shall pay for

it, everyone of you. I'll ruin you all. I'll, I'll——'

'If you had thought fit to upbraid me personally, Mr. Crammersh—to apostrophize my conduct as unworthy, reprehensible, in every way bad—I should have been unable to reply. But these foolish threats are misplaced, and they cannot affect or injure me; of that you must be well aware.'

'It's quite scandalous,' Mr. Crammersh persisted. He meant to have his say. 'I shall be a laughingstock, the common talk of the whole town. You do me an irreparable injury. You rob me; wound me to the quick; injure me in my own self-esteem and before the world,—why? only because you are capricious, deceitful; because, because——'

'Because I love some one else,' Winifred said, looking him straight in the face. 'How then could it be possible for me to become your wife?'

Mr. Crammersh was silenced for the moment, and Colonel Forsyth spoke next.

‘This wayward girl little thinks, I fear, the injury she is doing to herself. Still less does she care, in her recklessness and defiance of all propriety, what pain she is inflicting upon others. Mr. Crammersh, I will ask you to forgive us, at least. Lady Clementina Forsyth and myself grieve that you should have encountered this most unpleasant and disagreeable rebuff from any relative of ours. You will, I trust, perceive that we are powerless to protect you, and that, much as we sympathise with you, we cannot now, with any prospect of success, attempt to change Winnifred’s wicked and culpable resolve. All we can say is——’

‘To bid you good-bye,’ interrupted Winnifred, a little abruptly, to whom her father’s rather hypocritical long-windedness was just then particularly distasteful.

‘Do not think too harshly of me,’ she said, as she put out her hand ; and ‘shake hands with me for the last time.’

Mr. Crammersh, with a brusque negative

movement, turned away, and then and there walked out of the house.

‘What, pray, is the next move?’ Colonel Forsyth asked with mock courtesy. ‘Has Miss Forsyth decided to retire into a convent, or to go abroad, or how and where does she propose to hide her diminished head?’

‘My next move will be to marry Mr. Dominic Gwynne.’

‘Never!’ her father most emphatically declared. ‘Never, so help me heaven!’

‘He is coming to-morrow to claim me.’

‘He shall never darken my doors.’

‘Then I shall put on my bonnet and go with him to the nearest registry office, or to church.’

Which, briefly, within a few weeks she actually did. Dominic and Winnifred were married at the parish church hard by the studio, the only spectators being the sexton and Guy Greator, who gave her away. Afterwards they adjourned for an ordinary

breakfast of curry and deviled-kidneys to Guy's rooms, whence in a very quiet unpretending fashion, as if they had been married for years, they proceeded to Victoria Station *en route* for Switzerland and the South.

‘I don't like it; I don't, I don't, not in the very least,’ Guy Greatorrex said aloud, as the bride and bridegroom drove away. ‘No good can come of it; and I pity Dominic Gwynne from the bottom of my heart.’

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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